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WRITERS IN EXILE: A CONFERENCE OF SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN DISSIDENTS

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Editor's Note

In Daniel Bell's opening remarks as a moderator at the Conference of Soviet and East European Dissidents, published in *Partisan Review*, #3, 1983, a typographical error transformed the name of the Russian writer Biely into Bell.

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WRITERS IN EXILE:

A Conference of Soviet and East European Dissidents

Politics and Ideology

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Before we begin, I want to read a message from William J. Bennett, the new chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which has in large part funded this conference. Also, Robert Collen is here representing the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, which has also helped us to run this conference.

William Bennett says, in part: "I wish you success for a good conference. The issues you deal with are important. I'm sorry I can't be with you, but I'm busy at the National Endowment for the Humanities."

We also have with us Mr. Charles Fairbanks, the deputy assistant secretary of state for human rights, with a message from Secretary Haig. Mr. Fairbanks.

CHARLES FAIRBANKS: "I extend my best wishes to *Partisan Review* for having organized a meeting of individuals who know so well the high price of freedom, and to the participants, with a sense of encouragement for your efforts in the defense of intellectual and political liberty," signed, Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I now have the pleasure of introducing our moderator, Victor Erlich, who is the Besinger Professor of Russian Literature at Yale University. His best-known work is a book on Russian formalism.

VICTOR ERLICH: Our theme this morning is politics and ideology. We are fortunate to have with us four distinguished in-

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Editor's Note: Writers in Exile: A Conference of Soviet and East European Dissidents, was held on May 7 and 8, 1982, at Boston University. The conference was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Boston University Humanities Foundation, the Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities and Public Policy, and by the contributions of several private donors. Previous sessions of the conference were published in *Partisan Review*, 3, 1983. The New York sessions of the conference will be published in subsequent issues of *Partisan Review*. The Russian texts were translated by John Glad, Director, Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars. Edith Kurzweil was responsible for the organization of the conference.

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tellectuals who come from a part of the world where, for several decades now, life—social, political, intellectual, and moral—has been dominated and distorted by an ideology that was no less virulent for being increasingly stagnant, increasingly sclerotic, and fundamentally fraudulent. Not only have all of our panelists risked the ravages made by this ideology, but all of them at different stages and to varying degrees have challenged what Pasternak called in *Doctor Zhivago* "the reign of the dead letter." They all have challenged the dogma, not in behalf of another counterdogma, but in a spirit free from dogma and fanaticism.

Our first speaker is Boris Shragin. He has written many things on the political, social, and religious thought of Russian samizdat; and an important long essay, "The Challenge of the Spirit."

BORIS SHRAGIN: I would like to begin with a few remarks about the recent events in Poland—not only as a sign of my deepest respect and admiration for the Polish people, not only because they are very heroic and courageous, but also because they are very astute in their political behavior. Their achievement, despite the results, poses a challenge—not only for the Soviet regime, but also for us intellectuals and dissidents. This experience has forced us to reevaluate our positions, our ideas, our perspectives. And that is the main point of my presentation: to share with you some of my ideas.

Perhaps a good way to begin is with the theme of an article by Mr. Kolakowski, one of our panelists. It was published in 1979, before the recent Polish events, in an issue of *Survey*. In Poland, as in all the countries forcibly driven into the cage of the "New World," the Sovietization process doesn't mean that people actually start believing in the absurdities of the state doctrine—it means that people accept their oppression as an inescapable reality and resign themselves to the fate of being helpless, passive subjects of the police regime. To oppose this process is one of the crucial functions of the opposition.

I think this is an important idea for the dissident movements in all of Eastern Europe, and especially for dissidents and intellectuals in the Soviet Union. We tried to unmask the oppression, the lack of freedom in the Soviet regime. Until now we didn't have any clear perspective for the future of our country. Yesterday

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someone asked all of us what is likely to happen. We didn't answer, because we didn't know.

I would say that the main difference between dissident behavior and ideas in the Soviet Union and its Polish counterpart is that the Polish try to give hope to their people, they try to offer some prospects for Polish workers and peasants; and that is why this movement in Poland was so massive, intensive, heroic, and partly successful. From this point of view I would like to talk of the relation of ideology to politics, especially in the dissident movement in the Soviet Union.

In my opinion, the most important movement in the Soviet Union was the human rights movement. It was hard to publicize cases of oppression, but there were many achievements. It has been part of the philosophy of the human rights movements (and I support it) to separate problems of rights and laws from political or historical evaluations and perspectives. We did not have any political ideas about how to change the situation, but we did recognize the importance of making connections with all the dissident groups and tendencies that were united by the idea of human rights. Now, this is not enough. We have to think of the future. We know that in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe the official ideology is Communism; we also know that this Communist ideology is really dead—that is, nobody believes in Communism. Maybe there are enthusiasts in other parts of the world—in Italy and France—but there are none in the Soviet Union. Yet this ideology remains powerful there. How did this happen?

The answer, I think, does not lie in whether people believe or not, but in the fact that people have lost all hope. They believe that there is nothing they can do. They are despairing. The main tragedy, perhaps, is that the Soviet people are *too* skeptical. With their loss of faith in Communism, they lost the ability to have any faith at all. Their main ideology is not Communism but anti-Communism. People know that they live in horrible conditions, that they participate in the lying all around them—they all know this, from the first secretary of the Communist Party to the most obscure collective farmer. But this negative view of Soviet reality is not productive. It is not a useful substitute for the dead ideology of Communism. It is not enough to tell "the truth"

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about the Soviet system. It can be very irritating to people to know that everything is bad around them and to see and hear this again and again. An important characteristic of totalitarian ideology, as it was so well described by Hannah Arendt many years ago, is that it doesn't suppose that people believe in it; it doesn't rely for obedience so much on propaganda as on fear. When people are scared and anxious, they know that what they hear are lies but they support them because they are scared, not because they are believers. So, first of all we have to get rid of this fear. I may know very well that alchemy is wrong, but this is not enough for me to pass an exam in chemistry. The same goes for Communism: we know that it's wrong, but we don't know all the forces influencing the political process. Our evaluations, our statements, are usually too general. For instance, we used to say that the Soviet system was very stable—that it was generated by Marx, that Lenin continued these ideas, and that Stalin was a direct continuation of the ideas of Marx and Lenin, and so on with Krushchev and Brezhnev. And what is the result? We assume that our country hasn't changed at all—that it doesn't have a history. And if it didn't have a history before, then it is easy to conclude that it won't have a history in the future. So the result of criticism is nothing but despair.

We have to study our own country. We have to study what was written by scholars in the West, who know our country better than we do. We have to study the experience of Czechoslovakia, of Hungary; of Poland especially. For we know almost nothing. Nor do we know enough about the West. We have only very vague ideas of what "welfare system" means, and of other such important achievements.

We have to take one further step. Of course it is very important to continue our human rights activity, but we must preach less and learn more.

VICTOR ERLICH: Our second speaker is Stanislaw Baranczak, who is, without doubt, one of the most significant Polish men of letters of his generation. He is a gifted and resourceful poet, critic, and publicist. The title of one of his most important collections of essays is *Ethics and Poetics*.

STANISLAW BARANCZAK: I will start with two semantic problems; as a matter of fact my talk will be almost entirely devoted to semantic explanations. This event is called a conference of dissident writers, and in the program I read a description of my-

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self as a writer who emigrated from Poland. Both descriptions are, at least in my case, rather imprecise. First of all, I didn't emigrate. I left Poland in March 1981—that is, at its height of political freedom. I couldn't have foreseen anything like the events of December 1981, and nobody else could. Therefore, I didn't have the slightest intention of staying in the West forever. I may consider myself an exile—a temporary one—but *not* an émigré. So much for the first semantic distinction.

The second one is much more important, I think. As some of you may recall, Stanislaw Lem, a prominent Polish writer, wrote in the 1950s a grotesque science fiction story, the action of which took place on a certain distant planet. Its inhabitants, otherwise completely humanlike creatures, lived in a social system that forced everybody to live his life in water—preferably under water. Bubbling sounds were the only acceptable way of communication, the official propaganda emphasized the advantages of being wet, and occasional breathing above water was considered almost a political offense—although everybody had to do it from time to time. And of course, the whole population suffered from rheumatism and dreamed all the time about some dry place to live. But the propaganda still maintained that the fishlike way of life, especially breathing under water, was the highest ideal for which every citizen should strive.

I can't help recalling that short story whenever I hear the word *dissident*. Does someone who simply wants to have a breath of fresh air really deserve to be called a dissident? Should someone who simply can't live under water, his human lungs not allowing him to do so, necessarily be described that way?

And let's consider another possible situation. Suppose that one day the whole population of that fictional planet decides to live on dry ground, and only the rulers, the propaganda people, and the police still prefer to stay in water and to bubble their absurd slogans. Who would be a dissident then? As everybody knows, the word *dissident* comes from the Latin word *dissidere*, which means to sit apart. This implies at least two connotations: someone who sits apart behaves abnormally, opposes the behavior considered typical and normal; or he and other persons like him constitute a minority who sit apart from a supposedly much larger group. If we accept these two implied meanings, it becomes quite obvious that at least one of them cannot be applied to

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the so-called dissident in totalitarian countries. As many East European writers have pointed out—I have especially in mind Vaclav Havel from Czechoslovakia—the so-called dissidents in such countries may of course constitute a minority and they usually do, but on the other hand, they are the only normal people around. To put it more precisely, against the background of the rest of society, they seem to be the only human beings who want to live like human beings. The simplest definition, then, of a dissident writer is a writer who wants to practice his profession in a normal way—that is, without submitting his work to any control or interference. The simplest definition of a dissident scholar is a scholar who puts truth above propaganda—that is, who behaves normally, as every scholar actually should.

When I look back on my last decades spent in Poland, I can describe the atmosphere only as a gradual return of the society to some priceless normality. I had a chance to participate in that process; and my literary experiences during that period, which consisted of contributing to the creation of the independent publishing movement, seemed to me first of all a defense of normal, humanlike behavior against the faceless absurdity of the state censorship. The point was that a word should have been a word and a value a value; that nothing should have been deformed, concealed, or falsified. It wasn't a matter of some lofty principles. It was quite simply a physical impossibility of breathing under water.

I think the same can be said about everything else that has happened in Poland since the mid-seventies. At the beginning, the situation was quite typical of all totalitarian countries: a small group of normal people—so-called dissidents—surrounded by the majority of others who still preferred a way of life contrary to the human condition. Later, in 1980, something extremely atypical happened: the birth of a ten-million-strong phenomenon called Solidarity meant in practical terms that the word *dissidents* ceased to have any sense at all. In other words, not only the first, but also the second connotation of that term was no longer valid. What happened in August consisted of a massive return of the whole society to normality. In that sense, all attempts to interpret the phenomenon in traditional categories have been inaccurate and incomplete. Solidarity is not—or not only—a form of class struggle, as the Western leftists would like it to be. And it's not only a form of antitotalitarian protest, as the liberals would

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interpret it. And it's not only a national and religious revival, as a right wing conservative would prefer to have it. It's all that together, or, to put it more simply, it's a way from absurdity to normality—struggling for a life where a butcher shop would sell real meat and not garbage, teachers would teach the real history of Poland and not lies, and writers would write real books and not pieces of propaganda. What happens today, and what is taking shape into an amazing resistance against machine guns, water cannons, and loyalty oaths, is only a result of the fact that it's impossible to go back under water once one has tasted the fresh air of freedom and truth.

It's extremely important, in my opinion, that the West should finally understand what has really happened in Poland between 1980 and today. Because the West, in my opinion, still doesn't understand: we still hear about the supposed romanticism of Solidarity and the realism of the generals—as if there were anything irrational about Solidarity's vision of a rationally functioning society; as if it weren't these generals who chose the way of sheer political lunacy, who waged the war against the whole nation without any positive program. The same thing can be said about the question still raised by Western political observers: Didn't Solidarity go too far? Didn't Solidarity bring the defeat upon itself?

It would be too easy to dismiss these questions as a sign of hypocrisy, as an excuse for a lack of sympathy with Solidarity. In fact, the problem posed by those questions is important, and it demands some serious explanations and answers. However, let's notice one highly symptomatic thing: Everybody in the West asks whether Solidarity went too far; nobody asks whether General Jaruzelski went too far. Despite all its sympathy and compassion, the West seems to accept silently the basic assumption of Eastern propaganda: that the Communist authorities are always right when they're defending their monopoly of power. *They never* go too far, even when they declare a state of war against their own people. It's the people who go too far and who quite necessarily bring defeat upon themselves each time they try to demand some clean air to breathe—some of those basic liberties the West enjoys.

But, as I stated before, I don't think that the very fact of asking that question is only and always a symptom of hypocrisy and, in a direct way, of admitting that the world *is* divided into two

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spheres, only one of which has a right to enjoy freedom and democracy. The problem is more serious. The question of whether Solidarity went too far reflects a very basic difference between Western and Eastern ways of political thinking. Assuming that it was possible to stop half way, the West simply doesn't understand that there was *no* half way—there was no established point before which the process of liberation was safe and beyond which it was dangerous. In other words, the very fact of Solidarity's coming into existence was unacceptable to the Communist rulers. And from this point of view everything Solidarity did afterwards had almost no significance whatsoever.

Here, of course, another question arises: Was the creation of Solidarity necessary? Perhaps it would have been better for Poland to reconcile itself to its totalitarian destiny? My answer to these questions is very simple. Yes, the creation of Solidarity *was* necessary. To be more exact, it was at the same time necessary and impossible, as one of Solidarity's leaders put it. Everybody in Poland, despite some superficial optimism, was aware of the risk involved. But everybody was equally aware that people couldn't live under water any longer, that something had to be done in order to reverse Poland's heading toward a catastrophe. Whoever asks whether it was really necessary to create Solidarity should realize that without Solidarity, today's Poland would be a totally Sovietized country, ruled by corrupt and incompetent officers and inhabited by thoughtless slaves. And its hopes for the future, including an economic recovery, wouldn't be any better than they are now.

As it is, Poland is a country under occupation, but it's a country of free people who know exactly what they want and who most certainly will continue their struggle to achieve it. It's a country in which, paradoxically, the only people who sit apart and still try to breathe under water, the only people who still behave abnormally and who constitute the minority—in other words, the only real dissidents in today's Poland—are its Communist rulers.

VICTOR ERLICH: Our next speaker is Professor Erazim Kohák, who has been teaching philosophy at Boston University. He left his native country after the 1948 coup. He was at the time a member of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovakian Social Democratic Party.

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ERAZIM KOHÁK: I need not tell you that Professor Baranczak is a hard act to follow. But as it is, I shall attempt to follow his leading theme, because my particular concern is to try to get some clarity about the meaning and significance of the dissident phenomenon.

One of the things that troubled me somewhat in our reflections yesterday is that we tended to treat the dissidents as if they were a literary movement, as if it were primarily a literary phenomenon, the case of a group of authors who, because they subscribe to a particular manifesto, find themselves in conflict with the authorities of their native lands. Now, in some parts of the world this may be what "dissident movement" in fact means—primarily a literary phenomenon. But it would be very hard for me to describe the situation in Czechoslovakia in those terms.

When I first tried to formulate an idea of the ideology and politics of the dissident movement, I was very much at a loss. If I were to tell the truth, I would have to say it is not a movement at all, and it certainly has no ideology. We all were people living in a highly ideological state, and what we shared was simply the revulsion at all ideology. We were very effectively excluded from politics, and, having been organized in one movement after another, had an immense distrust of all movements. If I had to describe the people whom Western observers have labeled dissidents—and they are no more happy with that label that the Poles are—I would say that they are simply people who no longer can keep up the pretense. The metaphor of breathing under water is extremely apt. They are people who are tired of repeating the same lies again and again. Solzhenytsin speaks of not living the lie. Batzlab Habel, who is currently serving a four-and-a-half-year sentence, is a Czech playwright who speaks of living the truth. If I had to characterize the people whom you label dissidents, they are simply people who have decided to follow what our European cultural heritage makes both the highest calling and the most elementary right: to live with a clear conscience.

Now I know that among the dissidents the ones who come to public attention will be the writers. But there are so many others. I'll tell you about two of them. One is a laborer in his late forties. When he lost his wife he decided that he would devote all his free time to taking care of Gypsy children, who tend to be the flotsam

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of industrialization—half abandoned, living in the streets. He started taking them hiking, scrubbing them clean, giving them food, reading them stories. At his trial, his employer testified that he was a model worker—never absent, always doing his work. The teachers from the school testified that he had simply turned around children who were becoming lost in the margins of society. He received a two-year sentence; the charge was subverting the state control of cultic activity. Because he was a Catholic, when he gave food to the children he would make the sign of the cross before eating. For this he received a two-year sentence. He became a dissident even though he never wrote anything in his life.

The second case is even more ironic. This happened only six weeks ago, again in a provincial town, to a young man who was a Communist. He had lost most of his family in the last war, so he wholeheartedly endorsed Brezhnev's peace proposals and spoke against the nuclear arms race. The court ruled that, while opposition to nuclear arms should be encouraged in the aggressive capitalist countries of the West, in the socialist countries it represents a threat to the worker's movement. They sentenced him to two years.

What I am trying to suggest by these stories is that the literary dissidents with whom we are familiar are only the tip of the iceberg. If there is a base of the dissident movement, it's what the speaker before me was stressing: the unwillingness and inability—sometimes for reasons of conscience, sometimes simply out of total exhaustion—to go on with the pretense any more. The fact is that Czechoslovakia is still a Western country, under Byzantine rule, where freedom of conscience is both a high calling and a basic right. I know from experience that when you try to point this out to an American audience, you usually completely befuddle people's geographic sense, because the American perspective of the world is bipolar. There are two centers—the United States and the Soviet Union—each with its periphery, its suburbs, its various client states. The Americans have those areas that are open to American business—and this we call Western Europe—and the Russians have their little suburbs where the KGB has free access—and this we call Eastern Europe. So we think of the world as if there were no Europe at all, as if

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there were only America and the Soviet Union, each with its client states. But geographically, this kind of labeling is completely nonsense. Vienna is supposed to be a Western city, but when we go from Prague (which is supposed to be an Eastern city) to Vienna, we don't travel west, but rather two hundred miles to the east. In Berlin, whether Berlin is East or West depends on what street you happen to be standing. What is worse, it makes no sense culturally. There is a clear distinction in the cultural heritage of Europe between an Eastern and a Western tradition. The core of the Western heritage is very much the idea of a sovereign conscience—a conscience that is capable of rationality and morality. The basis of what we call the cultural West is precisely the conception of the human as a sovereign moral subject, and of the state simply as an administrative arrangement designed to serve but not to be the bearer of value. In this sense we can speak of Western Europe, certainly; but, in this sense, Czechoslovakia also is very much a part of the historic West.

But there is also an idea of Eastern Europe as the heir of Byzantium. What developed there was the sense of a state-church, or church-state—indivisible. It provided the basis for an ideological state—the state that is the bearer of conscience and the bearer of value—and of the citizen as someone whose task is to conform.

In this sense, you can speak of an East and a West, but then the labels are really not so much geographic as cultural. And you can argue that in the traditionally European West, whenever the West becomes fearful, whenever it is seized by the vertigo of freedom—by the really frightening isolation of individualism—it is a very great temptation to draw on the security of what the old imperial Russian government used to call "autocracy and true faith." After World War II we in Czechoslovakia were profoundly shaken by our encounter with German National Socialism. We wanted security, and there was a genuine Communist movement. The first client regimes responded just as much to our own longing for security as to the reality of the Soviet army. But we found our human face again. The West—Germany, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia—has recovered its Western conscience.

But the reality of Soviet power is such that the facade of the ideological state remains, though now it is only a facade;

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it has no substance. We who are spiritually a part of the West have to go through the gestures of conforming to the idea of an ideological state.

In this sense I see the significance of the dissidents as a reawakening of European conscience—of a Europe that had long been divided and uncertain of itself, a Europe prey to nihilism. Czechoslovakia and Poland are serving notice that the very basis of world peace today is extremely precarious; ever since World War II, such peace as we have had has been based on the idea of a divided Europe. What is becoming obvious is that the division of Europe can be perpetuated only by a very heavily armed presence, and this is the driving force behind the arms race.

So this reawakening of conscience is significant for the unoccupied parts of Europe and for America also, because, after all, we face a devil's bargain. In the East it is survival in exchange for conscience. In the West, the leading theoreticians speak of technological affluence at the cost of conscience. Here in Boston a leading theoretician is teaching us that freedom and dignity are obsolete and should be replaced by social engineering, which will ensure a far greater degree of affluence.

The phenomenon of dissidence movements is significant wherever people are asked to give up conscience for the sake of comfort, convenience, or security. In America, the counterparts of the Czechoslovak dissidents are not those who propose to substitute an orthodoxy—an American or Western orthodoxy —for the Marxist orthodoxy of the East. For me their counterparts are people like the great American dissident, Martin Luther King. He is to me a fellow dissident in America, as are those in the ecological movement—the people who are not willing to exchange ever-increasing affluence for an ever more regimented, devastated environment.

What we are witnessing is even more than a return to normality; it is a return to our moral humanity.

VICTOR ERLICH: Our next and last speaker is Leszek Kolakowski, who is one of the most seminal and wide-ranging philosophers living today. Since his departure from Poland in 1968 he has taught at Berkeley, at Yale, and at Oxford. He is now associated with the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI: Since my colleagues Boris Shragin,

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Stanislaw Baranczak, and Erazim Kohák have made attempts to identify the phenomenon of opposition, or the dissident movement, in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, I will try rather to concentrate my brief remarks on the phenomenon of the ideological empire. We have no experience, no historical analogies, on the basis of which we might make predictions with any degree of plausibility—predictions about how long a social organism, an empire whose only basis of legitimacy is its ideology, can survive in conditions where this ideology is almost completely evaporated and nobody takes it seriously any more.

It was, to be sure, a tremendous achievement to reconstruct a multinational empire on a completely different basis. Lenin, in this respect, might be compared to St. Augustine, who, as it were, ideologized the empire, gave it a doctrinal basis. Certainly, I don't want to stretch this analogy. After all, St. Augustine was a great philosopher and a great writer, whereas Lenin, as a philosopher and a writer, was rather an inept mediocrity—to put it charitably—though he was certainly a great genius of ideological manipulation. And whereas, as a practical politician, St. Augustine was a minor figure, Lenin was indeed the real founder of an empire.

Now, it's a curious thing to observe that the empire—or, rather, empires—whose legitimacy and claims were explicitly based on the Christian doctrine have all fallen apart. But the doctrine itself—Christianity as an idea—has not died out at all. On the other hand, the great empire dominated by a sect professing the Marxist ideology has not fallen apart, but its doctrine, we may fairly say, is dead. And the price, or a part of the price, for this reconstruction of the empire was really to deprive this empire of its Russian nature. I think it is fair to say that it is a Soviet and not a Russian empire. Even so, it is perfectly true that it is destroying the national characters of Lithuania, of Georgia, of Armenia; it is also true that it has destroyed the Russian character as well—and very thoroughly. At a certain moment we even believed that this empire had managed to destroy completely the autonomous, spiritual forces of Russian life—the life that Russia had inherited from the Tartar political tradition. It is important to remember this distinction whenever we think of Russia's future destiny. If we take any book written in Russian, we know immediately after the first few sentences whether it is a

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Russian book or a Soviet book written in the Russian language. We know that if the latter is the case, this book could have been written in Estonian or in Uzbek, and it would have been exactly the same book.

This ideology is dead in the sense that it is not independent, viable, influencing the political decisions of the rulers of this empire, and in the sense that nobody takes it seriously, as a real reason for loyalty towards this regime or its leaders. It is true, on the other hand, that the Soviet leaders apparently do not know any other idiom in which to express themselves besides this Leninist-Stalinist jargon. They use this jargon naturally and automatically without thinking of its grotesqueness when confronted with reality—a reality that they simply call "annexation." They call liberation "dynocide," "class struggle," and so on. In this sense, they internalize the Leninist-Stalinist jargon, but the poverty of the language has not much to do with, I would say, the viability of the ideology. Besides, Alexander Zinoviev, the famous Russian writer and philosopher now in Germany, argues that the Soviet population accepts this ideology without resistance—not, of course, because it really believes in its content, but because, as he himself put it, the Soviet system really has succeeded in producing what is called "the Soviet man" or "the socialist man," an empty, will-less, ignorant mannequin who accepts without resistance this ideological noise—a noise whose only real meaning consists in showing the people who is in power.

But Zinoviev's assessment of the situation is too pessimistic. The picture is not as bleak as that. If what he says is true, then we could expect the ideology to remain rigid and unchanged. Nor would there be the slightest effort on the part of the political apparatus to adjust it or adapt it for the purpose of reaching a minimal level of communication with the population, because the content in this case would have no importance.

The present, the actually binding, official state ideology—and I don't have in mind only what we can read in the editorial pages of *Pravda* or in the textbooks of "Diamat" in the Soviet Union, but also the ideology that is served to the people through various means, such as films—not only is this ideology not codified, in contrast with the Stalinist one, not only are its borders unclear, but also and above all, it is different in content. It is really, one may say, a synthetic ideology—something that the

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Germans call "Eklektische Bettelsuppe," the eclectic beggar's soup—in which shreds of Marxist phraseology are mixed with ideas of imperial glory, with antiyellow racism, with anti-Semitism, and, with xenophobic ideas in general. What this proves is that a certain minimal level of contact is needed, is necessary after all, and that the idea of producing this "socialist man" or "Soviet man" did not succeed, at least not in the degree to which Zinoviev argues it has.

However, we must keep in mind that what has kept a certain degree of viability in this obscure ideology are those ingredients that have nothing to do with Marxism in any recognizable sense, even those that stand in opposition to the traditional Marxist tenets. On the other hand, despite the fact that this ideology in its Communist form is dead for all practical purposes, it is still indispensable *precisely only* as an instrument of legitimacy for the power of the Party. And if, for instance, this ideology were given up or abandoned entirely in favor of, say, a great Russian nationalist ideology—as some, *but only some*, segments of the dissident movement in Russia would have it—this would amount to removing the very basis on which the Party's claims to domination rest. A coup with this sort of ideological transformation as its goal would probably mark the end of the empire as we know it.

On the other hand, the ideological ruin of Communism in countries dominated by this empire does not make for significant options to the rulers. In the formally independent countries—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, those forcibly incorporated into the Soviet empire but formally sovereign—the situation is pretty simple, I would say. In Poland, both national values and democratic ideals are pretty strong, and Communism appears, especially in the last months, simply as a gown without any ideological adornment. Even so, it is true that in all these countries there are social layers that have vested interests in the indefinite continuation of this oppressive regime, and these layers may be numerous. Nevertheless, nobody can doubt that in a condition of true sovereignty for all these countries, Communism wouldn't survive even one week.

I am not in a position to say what the potential is of effectively instigating nationalist ideologies in the Soviet Union itself. Boris Shragin and other Russian friends are much better qualified to make comments on that. But the ideological void

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that Communism has produced has brought about a situation that I find extremely dangerous, one that threatens us with increasing tensions and explosions. A continental empire not only *can* but *has to* expand if it doesn't want to shrink. But even in its dependencies in the so-called Third World, Communism as an ideology means hardly more than a despotism based on Soviet weapons and the Soviet security police—the so-called advisors. In democratic countries, however, Marxism-Leninism as an all-embracing, comprehensive ideology has become a sort of amusement for adolescents. What is really operating is not Communism proper, it is Sovietism. But Sovietism as an ideology, in contradistinction to sheer imperial power, has no definable content itself.

What I want to stress is simply that our world has ushered in a very dangerous phase. Western statesmen have no means of preventing explosive situations from occurring periodically in this entire geographical area of countries dominated by the Soviet Union. The ideological void of this empire, which is still substantially based on Sovietism, is likely to produce more tensions and more explosions in the Soviet Union itself, because the rulers are unable to cope with all sorts of social, economic, and national tensions in their country. If we are not prepared—if we do not think about how we will face the inevitable collapse, the inevitable disintegration of the Soviet empire that will result from the progressive dying away of its ideological base—this disintegration might well occur in a manner that will be extremely explosive and extremely dangerous to our entire world.

VICTOR ERLICH: Is there anyone in the audience who would like to open the discussion?

TERRY QUIST: Why is it that in the United States, it is particularly the academic class that has ignored the continuing function of ideology in Eastern Europe? Do you think it could be because of Western progressive ideology, and do you think that this Western ideology could explain not only our ignorance on this question but also the silly notion of "convergence"—the idea that we have our superstitions, our religion, our capitalism, they have their superstitions, their Communism; and that Communism, religion, and capitalism will inevitably disappear, and everyone will come together and be rational?

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LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI: Well, I would say, and you would probably agree with me, that the idea of a clash between two systems of superstitions, both of which are bound to disappear, is itself a superstition and an extremely naive world view to which I could never give any serious credence. I am not sure that I could say why the real function of this ideology is largely ignored. I am not even sure that it is—I mean, at least there are some people (perhaps not many) who realize what this ideology is for and what its social function is. But it is really somewhat difficult for people educated in what is essentially an ideologically competitive society, an open society where ideological conflicts are freely expressed, to realize the conditions in a totalitarian one. This ideology in its ossified, solid form is, apart from other things, so primitive and so intellectually poor that we normally don't like to pay much attention to its content—it's so unattractive to people educated in the Western tradition. As several people yesterday pointed out, there are difficulties for people educated in the Soviet Union in trying to convey that experience to their colleagues or friends in this country. This might be less so for Polish émigrés, because Poland has never been as isolated from Europe and the West as the Soviet Union is, but I understand this difficulty of communication, and I cannot offer any cure for it, except for a long and patient attempt at mutual understanding.

ERAZIM KOHÁK: May I add a footnote to this—which won't be a cure, but perhaps part of the diagnosis. Look around yourself at your countrymen, at the extent to which they see the sole purpose of existence as gaining greater affluence. What we all want is bigger television sets!

Encounters With the West

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: We have amongst us a very distinguished novelist who is also in exile and who doesn't want his name mentioned. He said he found it strange that, since many of the dissidents are Jewish, the words *Jews* or *Jewish* were not men-

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tioned once so far. I do recall that Mr. Kolakowski's paper mentioned anti-Semitism.

The subject this afternoon is encounters with the West. Among some of the things we would like to know are: what the panelists think of American and European society, of our political systems, of our policies; what the meaning of freedom really is in the West; what they think—insofar as they have some knowledge of it—of American and European literature. Our first panelist is Sergei Dovlatov.

SERGEI DOVLATOV: This is my first public performance in English, so let me ask you to be indulgent. I've lived in the United States for three years and still speak English very badly. Generally, Russian emigrants speak English on different levels, which can be denoted as subway English, supermarket English, then *Daily News* English, and as the absolute peak of proficiency, Chinatown English. The hardest thing is communication with waiters in Chinese restaurants.

In any event, to understand English doesn't mean to take in America. This is all the more true for the writer whose job is to go beyond the word and try to see what is behind it. When I was leaving Leningrad, my benevolent friends said: "You will get lost in America. Only scientists and engineers get settled there, and all kinds of handymen. But journalists, writers, artists, literally perish—especially if they are not geniuses, as you are not," my friends added cruelly.

And here I am in America. I've tried to live the way people here do, and I have learned something already: alas, my benevolent friends were right; all they said is true, but it is not the full truth. I would even say it was only the legend of truth.

It is very difficult to make a living by writing if you are not a genius. What's to be done? In the first place, you could be a genius. Who doesn't allow you to be one? You wouldn't be punished for it here. Be a genius and flourish, develop your talent. Joseph Brodsky is a genius, and he is all right. He writes poems, reads his lectures, flies to Europe, collects his awards. But, it's not everybody's lot to be a genius: it's not enough just to want it, and personal conviction doesn't help, either. But how are things with ordinary people, with honest, qualified writers?—not with the best men of letters or the worst ones, but with writers who keep an honorable relationship with a piece of

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paper, and who nevertheless have not and probably never will create masterpieces? Well, even if you publish in American magazines and your books are printed in English, it's a hard way to live.

Are the difficulties in America the same as in the Soviet Union? God forbid! In Russia, a writer has to deal with the ideology; in America, with marketing. Neither is paradise, but the notions of "a talented book" and "a profitable book" sometimes coincide. Not always, certainly, and even not often—let's say in one case out of ten. But the notions of "a talented book" and "an ideologically correct book" can *never* coincide. In America everybody has a chance. Maybe your book will never be good enough. Don't get upset. On a moral scale, an honest failure to create a masterpiece is equal to success, and is even better than success, since it's not rewarded.

We are published. Isn't that what I dreamed of all my conscious life? Wasn't this the aim for which I made so many sacrifices? In the States, only those write for whom it is an urgent spiritual need. Of course, I mean serious prose, serious literature. Leo Tolstoy dreamed about it; Turgenev was ashamed to take royalties. Let us remember that the great Russian poet Lermontov published only one book of verse during his lifetime. If I am not mistaken, it was only one hundred twenty-three pages long. The Russian poet Anton Delvig published not even one book; the Russian poet Vinevitinov, none; Dobrolyubov and Belinsky, the great Russian critics, did not see their books published in their lifetimes. Now, how many did the Soviet poet Vladimir Fiersov publish? Was it forty? Or eighty? And the ignoramus Soviet writer Pomerantsev, and the illiterate Soviet writer Safronov? Using their books instead of bricks—their books look like bricks—we could fix all the damaged buildings in the South Bronx.

There is another problem. In the Soviet Union, the writer is accorded great respect. The public attitude toward the writer in the USSR reminds me of the American attitude toward movie and sports stars. If TV and advertising could exist in some future Soviet Union, between episodes on the screen you might not see Farrah Fawcett or Mohammed Ali but Yuz Aleshkovsky and Andrei Siniavski—although Farrah is far more beautiful than Siniavski and even than Aleshkovsky. In America, an

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ordinary writer is more like an ordinary man. It's more prestigious to be in business, medicine, engineering, political affairs, or law. The serious writer is visible and respected only in a very small circle of readers. Our books published here are going to Russia in one hundred copies. All in all, we have readers not only in New York, Boston, and Paris, but also in Moscow, Leningrad, Tallin, Kiev, and in every other place that copies of our books can get to. And there they change hands until they are reduced to dust. If books had souls and could communicate, we might learn that every book wishes that this could be its fate.

We, the Russian emigrants, play prophets and teach mankind the right way to live. Recently, in a Russian newspaper, a doctor published a big article about how badly Americans eat. This doctor, like myself, lived all his life eating canned food, which my intelligent dog refuses to eat.

We Russians live worse than others. Our government is the stupidest and cruelest, but we still teach others how to live. This is a paradox, but also a form of justice. Like doctors and pharmacologists who test their medicines on themselves, we can do research on ourselves—on law and lawlessness, on the logic and nonlogic of history. We know something that other nations do not—that Americans, in any case, cannot know. For instance, we know that a kind, sympathetic, and cultured nation is able to become a flock of lambs—or, what is worse, a pack of wolves. We know that socialism and Soviet power is not only a regime but also a way of life for many millions of people. We know that our government is not a group of rascals who usurped power, and not a gang of robbers from the planet Mars. They are part of the people to whom we also belong, which means that a small part of us and our souls are in the Soviet government.

When we lived in the USSR, we thought that America was a paradise; life was so horrible there that life in the great antipode seemed to be paradise. Now we have lived in America a few years, and we have persuaded ourselves that there is no paradise on earth. Above all, we have discovered traits of socialism in America. For example, the American post office is an almost socialistic enterprise. We see in America things that look like Soviet absurdities. One of my friends worked in American business. One week his boss paid him less than they had arranged. So my friend went to him, saying, "You paid me fifteen dollars

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less," and the boss answered, "My dear friend, what does fifteen bucks mean to you? But for our company, it's big money." My friend was so surprised that he nodded with understanding.

We have expected dynamism, logic, and nonbureaucracy in America. We used to think that all Americans were very confident. I worked for a Russian weekly whose owner was a very nice American fellow. One time, he came to the editorial office and said, "Serge, we use too much photographic paper; paper is very expensive. Can you print pictures on regular plain paper?" I almost fell off my chair. I said, "What are you talking about? It's impossible." But he said, "Well, maybe you can try." This boss would do well working in a Soviet enterprise; he would even receive high rewards.

We have to learn a lot of things in America, but America can benefit from our experience, too. So let's start benefiting each other. I don't want to sound so gloomy. But, I do think that fun and sadness always go together. So let me digress for a minute to tell you a story. Soviet Minister Gromyko came to the Polish city of Lodz, and a magnificent reception was organized for him. The local intelligentsia were invited. Among them was a famous writer, Jerzy Ruzhevich. They were having a big banquet out in the open. They proclaimed steadfast oaths and toasts. Gromyko was drinking Polish vodka; his face was getting red. He bent over to Ruzhevich, who by chance looked up, and Gromyko said, "Excuse me, where can I make pee-pee here?" "You?" asked Ruzhevich. Then he got up, stretched out his palms, and exclaimed, "For you, everywhere."

There are many terrible things and many marvelous things in the world. No paradise and no hell in our life, and still we are living. We have freedom, but freedom, if it is a reality, is equally well-disposed to bad and good. It's like the sun: roses and marijuana blossom equally well under its rays. With freedom, the bad becomes monstrous, and the good becomes delightful. To make things monstrous or delightful depends on us.

In Leningrad a few years ago, one of my friends was translating an American film for the members of the filmmakers' club. The action bounced back and forth between Paris and New York, and a rather banal technique was used: if Paris was shown, then the Eiffel Tower appeared on the screen; and if it was New York, then the Brooklyn Bridge. My friend would pedantically

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say, "Paris, New York, Paris, New York, Paris, New York." Finally it became so stupid to him he stopped naming the cities. Then a voice yelled out from the audience, "Why aren't you announcing the stops?" My friend, a little surprised, said, "New York." In answer, the same voice pronounced, "Stop! I'm getting off."

I did the same as the man from the audience: I got off. I still have many problems, individual and professional, and nevertheless for the first time in my life, I am happy. And I know only too well to whom I should be thankful, because the sole aim of my emigration was freedom. I would like to finish all my speeches in America with this wonderful word.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Our next speaker is Yuz Aleshkovsky. Like Aksyonov, he emigrated to the United States after the 1979 *Metropol* dispute. He has written poetry, movies, children's books, and novels, including *Nikolai Nikolaevitch, Kangaroo, Camouflage,* and *The Hand.* He's currently a lecturer at Wesleyan University.

YUZ ALESHKOVSKY: As strange as it may seem in the West, on the first morning in Vienna at a picturesque bazaar, where each person appeared, because of the unimaginable quantity of food, to be not an inhabitant but an artist shopping for a realist still-life painting, the seemingly primitive thought entered my head: But why then the Soviet regime? Please don't think that up until that morning in Vienna I had never pondered the nature of Marxism-Leninism and the bloody Stalinism it engendered. Possibly I was too intent on finding a metaphysical solution to the problem; or perhaps the search for a convenient sociological system of explanation interfered with the posing of that extremely simple and even seemingly idiotic question: But why then the Soviet regime? Why does it exist, Lord, if three hundred million people have been deprived of the possibility of eating normally for decades: Why, if in something over half a century's time a centuries-old natural culture has been almost completely razed? Why does it exist, if, in the place of a futile striving toward social equality, toward brotherhood, toward freedom, the masses have lived in that which at times is shamefully called in the West a "closed society" and, to put it more precisely, a prison of entire peoples unprecedented in the history of mankind? "There is no answer," Gogol said.

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Crowds of sincere pacifists, seized with a legitimate anxiety over the existence of life and culture, do not see farther than their own noses, and perhaps are not able, in their fear, to make out the true culprits behind the catastrophic state of today's world. Why does the Soviet regime exist? I could have asked this simple and seemingly inoffensive question there, at home, in a calm and academic way, but it so impudently attempts to shoulder its way into the aristocratic company of eternal questions that it undoubtedly would have led me directly to a madhouse. If I had tried to express my thoughts publicly or write an essay on this topic in *samizdat*, I would have been provided with a minimum, seven-year amputation of my freedom. But since I consider going to prison voluntarily to be a perverted form of suicide, the instinct of self-preservation and the capacity and joy of living in freedom led me to the West. And here I can freely discuss this accursed topic: Why, then, does the Soviet regime exist? But without a correlation of this not so simple question with the categories of good and evil, a more or less intelligible answer is impossible.

My encounter with the West, with the best and free part of the world, to which alone the hopes of mankind can be tied today, has helped me to realize and to feel the fullness of an opinion prevalent now: that our entire civilization is rubbish—even with all the wonders of technological progress and the unprecedented high standards of living in the developed countries! I don't want to go into an analysis here of its dark aspects and discuss the decay of morals, the degeneration of culture and art, the monstrous ecological revelations, and the contradictions of capitalism.

Having successfully escaped from Dracula, from the Soviet regime, I suddenly began to encounter its closest blood relatives in the amazingly beautiful expanses of the New and the Old Worlds. Trembling with horror and loathing, I see *Sovieticus draculat* in the talentless specimens of mass culture that truly ravage the human spirit, in the obtuseness and blindness of independent politicians surrendering one after another the bastions of freedom to world totalitarianism, not without any resistance, but without any special pressure from it. I encounter relatives of the Soviet Dracula among the members of the Red Brigades and among terrorists of many other colors, and God only

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knows where else and in what form. In a word, I take the liberty of drawing the following conclusion: In all that is decisively untalented, vulgar, and degrading to the human spirit and the dignity of existence, whether it be a thing, a work of art, a relation to nature, people, culture, and society, there is without fail a Soviet kindred one, which must be called *world evil* and exposed as *world evil*. This realization is essential for our common salvation, for the salvation of those still living in freedom, and for all those peoples enslaved by totalitarianism.

In the West I discovered, to my surprise, that the degree to which both simple laborers and the intelligentsia distinguished between good and evil was much greater and more heartfelt in the Soviet bloc nations, particularly in the USSR, than in the free world. We are speaking here solely of a feeling of the nature of totalitarianism. But what, strictly speaking, can be said of the simple people who for sixty-five years have endured the triumph of Communist ideas, hunger, cold, wars, prisons, slave labor, and demagogy? What can be said of the creative and scholarly intelligentsia, which has endured, in addition, measures aimed at degrading the human spirit that, unfortunately, have exceeded any previously known?

Even in private, mainly drunken talks with Party bosses, with generals, with prominent economic planners, with gangsters from cinematography, the Writers Union, sports, trade, science, and so on, there arose among us, despite differences in world views, a full unity of opinion towards the system. The System—we clenched our teeth at the thought of the dark, alien power fettering the normal, healthy, vital activity of the country. This power spurs with skeleton bones the same Gogolian troika—and at the same time the aged coachmen—Politburo members, who have lost possession of their faculties, driving it toward a hellish abyss. Tragic experience and the facts of ugly reality themselves correlated the notorious Soviet system with evil, with an evil that is objective and that triumphs all the spheres of the "building of Communism." Forgive me for this Soviet journalistic cliché, which I have used not without disgust and shuddering. My criticism of the totalitarian monster is not simply the result of my far from apologetic attitude toward the way of life of the West, although I do not conceal a romantic

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feeling of love for freedom and a faith in the normal potentials of democracy.

I think that one of the greatest ironies in history is that the peoples of the Soviet Empire, having long ago overcome the seduction of evil at the cost of unimaginable sacrifices, watch in horror as the West, as the entire free world, heads in the direction from which they have come, at least morally—toward the epicenter of seductive evil, where the free creative spirit of man resides behind heavy bars. Are not the sympathies toward Communism of millions of French and Italians tragicomic?

I understand that enlightened awareness and the fearless confrontation of world evil are repeatedly hindered today by the marvelous facility of evil to pass itself off as good. After arguments with some of my American friends, I think, why, by some strange laws of fate, has not, or cannot, this most horrifying experience of a people that surrendered in the beginning to seductive evil be inculcated into their consciousness? After all, as one wise person has it, only fools learn from their own mistakes; intelligent and observant people try to learn from the mistakes of others.

For the alleviation of many grave and at times insoluble problems of existence, the human race is provided with the ability to distinguish between good and evil. True, I don't know whether this splendid gift distinguishes us advantageously or not from the lions, fish, gazelles, lovely birds, cats, crocodiles, spiders, and elephants—from those so successfully freed of wandering in the labyrinths of moral problematics. The expression "Better red than dead," a favorite with both Soviet war criminals and weak-sighted pacifists whom they encourage, is justifiable only for one representative of the planet's animal world: the chameleon which is saved by turning red or yellow.

And, once more, I am personally convinced that the turning red of today's capitulators, bought at the cost of denying essential human values, if it saves them temporarily from death, then later at best will throw them into unimaginable chaos. This occurred at one time in Russia with the overwhelming majority of the Russian liberal intelligentsia, which had sympathized with the demons of revolution.

Recall for a moment recent Soviet history, and you will no

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longer doubt that the demons of revolution, the demons of chaos and social entropy, never display a noble attitude (there's no reason even to speak of an esthetic one), either toward the capitulated enemy or even toward representatives of their own biological species. We humans are so full of the arrogance of superiority over the whole animal kingdom that, in a certain sense, we have dulled in ourselves a number of powerful instincts. I dare say that none of us has ever seen a wild animal considered a victim in the hierarchical system of the jungle graciously prance, crawl, leap, jump, and run headlong into the jaws of its predator. Of course, the classic exception is the poor rabbit, whose will is crushed and perverted by the hypnotic stare of the boa constrictor.

Here in America, after conversations and arguments with my American friends, with students, with several representatives of the intellectual elite and the artistic intelligentsia, I think dispiritedly that the public opinion of the free world, consciously or unconsciously, is "rabbitized" and—what is even more sad—willingly accepts this risky "rabbitization." Of course, Moscow itself ordered Communists, leftist terrorists, and extreme radicals to be "rabbit breeders." They gratify themselves with illusions of being in blissful symbiosis with the powerful boa constrictor.

Why, I think, don't many of the living gratefully grasp the experience of those who have been destroyed by the evil that is correctly called Communism? The essence of the disquieting voice of Solzhenitsyn is only partly in his criticism of the state of Western life. The true pathos of the writer is in the passionate, sympathetic attempt to bring the West to an understanding of the suffering, the instructive experience of the peoples enslaved in Soviet camps.

Fortunately, many people throughout the world sensibly and cautiously look upon the logic of left wing radicalism and its potentials of fascism. Sages and psychologists have long known that, in defending their political and philosophical convictions, people selflessly lose their logic, their common sense, and most importantly, their sense of reality.

Let's just observe for a moment the "fans" of the USSR, "fans" of so-called socialism, "fans" of the phantom of Communism. Some of them are quite inaptly called "liberals." According to the ardent conviction of these fans, neither the inhumanity of tyrannical regimes, the chronic economic ills of

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the USSR and its subordinate countries, nor the degradation of morals and culture have any connection with the nature of Communism, of the Soviet regime, and the shining ideals of Marxism. All the rubbish and blood of a ruined historical experiment they attribute not to the organic properties of uncontrolled power, economics—the external and internal policies of the USSR—but exclusively to the cost of a healthy revolutionary process, to growing pains, to notorious historical necessity, and, of course, to the intrigues of hostile reaction. These people don't want to admit defeat and appear to us to be fanatics. The manner of their political conduct is determined by the loss of a feeling of reality; their thoughts are ruled by a depraved desire—the desire to win back, the desire to prove to oneself once and for all the correctness of the original game plan and the judiciousness of all the sacrifices made in the exciting game.

But in our age of unstoppable rockets and superbombs, it is time for political and moral bankrupts to cease their suicidal games, time to cease risking the last stakes in history: our lives and theirs, the genetic fate of our descendants, and the cultural values of mankind. Which today is more moral: to support a totally defeated system romantically and devotedly, or to look judiciously into why we are facing the threat of destruction? Which is more noble: to stand up face to face to the merciless truths of reality, to correlate the promises of centuries-old manifestos with the demagogy of Soviet propaganda, with the essence of Soviet politics—or to support, support, support, naively and cynically and criminally furthering the biased perversion of the objective experience of history?

I am convinced that the "fans" only untie the hands of the true warmongers, the people whose ideology and politics have ended up in such a hopeless dead end that they see the blackmail of peoples by nuclear war, local confrontations, terrorism, and the destabilization of world democracies as their only chance of winning. I am sincerely convinced that the USSR, which sends out its malignancies throughout the world, infects not only other peoples but also its own. A thorough analysis of the character of each of them would reveal the symptoms of a chronic spiritual devastation, multiplied by the delusions of grandeur and persecution driving them into paranoic adventurism.

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The Soviet leaders, in calling for peace, undoubtedly have in mind only the peoples of the capitalist countries. But if, in fighting for peace, we can help people to realize the true reasons for world tension and thus to stave off a cataclysm, then peace on earth will truly be preserved and secured.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Thank you. Our next speaker is Vladimir Voinovich.

VLADIMIR VOINOVICH: We all curse Marxism. But I will speak of it not as a doctrine, but as a fashion. Have you heard the anecdote about the Armenian radio: "What is Marxism? Is it a science, or not?" The answer to this question: "No, because if it were a science, they would test it out on dogs first."

Now the Soviet social system looks even more strange than in the past. Two hundred million people are building an edifice, but not one of the builders of this edifice—from managers to laborers—believes in the feasibility of successfully completing its construction.

It is said that Communism has many supporters in the West. But I think that it has gone out of fashion all the same. Fashion spreads in the following way: it is born in some center, grows, and then goes to the provinces. In the center they have already forgotten about it. And here the center is the Soviet Union, where Communism has gone completely out of fashion. In the West European countries, in America probably to a lesser extent, it still hasn't gone out of fashion, and somewhere in Africa it's just coming in. I knew a sailor who went to Italy, bought shoes for 1,000 lira which had gone out of fashion ten years ago, and then sold them in the provinces, in the Ukraine, for 50 roubles each. So I think that when something has gone out of fashion, it finally comes to naught, and no matter how terrible Marxism might appear to us, it must eventually disappear—in the West as well. But we have no guarantee that it will not be followed by some new fashion, some new insane idea that will attract millions of followers.

There is a writer in Moscow whom I have known for twenty years. When we first became acquainted, he was still a rather young romantic type who had just become disillusioned with Stalin and had returned to Lenin. He had a framed picture of Lenin on his desk, a portrait of Mayakovsky on the wall, and a bust of his beloved hero Marat on a pedestal. My friend considered me

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a cynic for poking fun at him and his idols. He liked to tell me that I was not progressive, that I was backward, and that I could not properly assess events in their complexity, because I didn't read Lenin. He said I would understand everything if only I would read Lenin, since Lenin had the answers to all questions. Although I was not opposed to Lenin, I couldn't believe he had answers to all possible questions, and therefore I was in no mood to read him more carefully. Years passed, and my friend did not stand still ideologically. Lenin's portrait disappeared from the wall, replaced by a portrait of Rosa Luxemburg. Next to the portrait of Mayakovsky there appeared a portrait of Brecht. Later—sometimes together, sometimes replacing each other—portraits of Hemingway, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Pasternak, Akhmatova, and Solzhenitsyn made their appearances. For a while there was even a picture of Sakharov. Marat held out longest of all—perhaps because busts are more difficult to replace. I could not manage to keep up with all the stages of my friend's development, but I knew that one thing had not changed: my friend was always, up front, a romantic. And I was a backward, retrograde cynic. Finally we had a quarrel, and I did not drop in on him for several years. When I did, I saw that the decorations had changed radically: icons and portraits of Nicholas II and Father Florensky had appeared. I found Marat behind a bookshelf, covered with a thick layer of dust. We chatted for a while—until I expressed certain backward views, and my friend explained to me that my misapprehensions were explained by the fact that I had not read Father Pavel Florensky. And I realized that my friend had a new, progressive world view.

My friend's development was characteristic of people of my generation. Many of them radically altered their original views. Some changed from Marxism and atheism to orthodoxy and monarchism, others to Zionism, others to Buddhism, and still others to cynicism. It all went according to schedule. Leo Tolstoy once said, "People say it is shameful to change one's views, but I say it is shameful not to change them."

Personally, I prefer doubts to convictions. I have met too many people who are convinced that they are right in supporting a cause that has made others unhappy. If a person does finally realize that he has been in error all his life and been on the wrong road, he ought to stop and think. And if he decides to rush off in

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another direction, he ought at least not try to drag others along with him.

Intellectuals are now heatedly debating the degree to which the Soviet system departs from Marxism, and whether or not it is a perversion of Marxism. I believe that any answer to this question will be tardy, because humanity is threatened by new ideologies that are still in the process of formation. We must realize that the successes of Marxism were not accidental. Marxists took over slogans developed by many generations of humanists, writing words such as *freedom, equality, fraternity* on their banners.

People sometimes say that democracy produces destructive ideas and that we need authoritarianism rather than democracy. What exactly is authoritarianism? It is rule by the authorities. But who should be considered an authority, who will name him, and for how long? Will not such an authority simply appoint himself? Were not Lenin and Stalin authorities for millions of people? Many former Soviet citizens are saying, "We have traveled such a road and undergone such experiences that we can now teach other people a thing or two." I cannot agree. It seems to me that the experience of a man who has spent his entire life in prison cannot teach anything to a man who has lived his entire life in freedom. We ought not so much attempt to teach others as to learn ourselves.

Many of us are not indifferent to the fate of the Soviet Union, the country where we were born and raised. The actions of that country cannot be a matter of indifference to the rest of the world either, inasmuch as it is a superpower and its fate is inevitably intertwined with the fate of the rest of the world.

Unfortunately, many Soviet people, in rejecting Marxism, Communist slogans, and internationalism, ultimately come to nationalism. And then they begin to talk, if not about who lives better, then at least about who lives worse. And just who has suffered the most from the Soviet authorities? The Estonians, the Latvians, and the Lithuanians, for example, consider their countries to have been occupied by the Soviet government. The Ukrainians hate the Muscovites, while those Muscovites maintain that it is precisely Russian culture that has suffered more than any other. As far as I can tell, we've all suffered enough. For example, the Chechens, the Kalmyks, and the Crimean Tartars have all suffered enough. Regardless of what the future may hold,

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the fate of all these peoples is interconnected: no one nation will be able to resolve its fate separately.

The Soviet Union is in a crisis situation—politically, strategically, economically. It is a sick organism, whose boils are breaking out in Poland. Sooner or later the Soviet government will have to come to grips with a growing number of problems. Things cannot remain as they are: current problems cannot be resolved by a mere turn of the screw. This would be possible only for a state at the peak of its power.

No one any longer believes in this system, or that it could continue to function. Perhaps democracy is the only real way out. I know the response to this argument is that neither the Soviet leadership nor the population have any concept of democracy. But in the history of Russia, the period following 1861 was a period of democratic reform in a serf state. And these reforms were accepted by society. So if we Russian émigrés wish to work for the good of our country, we must do everything we can to promote the development of democratic thought among Soviet citizens. And then, perhaps, the Soviet Union will slowly—very slowly—set out along that path. Thank you.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: The next speaker is Andrei Siniavski. He is the editor of *Syntaxis*, an émigré magazine. A publishing house attached to it is run by his wife, Maria Rozanov. He is the author of a famous essay on socialist realism written under a pseudonym, Abram Tertz, and smuggled out of the Soviet Union.

ANDREI SINIAVSKI: Probably many of us—I have in mind recent emigrants—have a perceptual experience of the West that is very diverse, vivid, even exceptional in its acuteness, while at the same time it is quite confused, impressionistic, and not thought out. In any case, I cannot personally say that I live in the West and understand the West in the full sense of the word. I still don't live, but look through the eyes of a traveler who finds himself in the next world. Everything is very interesting, unusual, strange, and different than you imagined.

Eight years ago we were flying from Paris to Rome. The airplane circled over the Leonardo da Vinci airport and could not land. The Earth would not receive us, on Earth there was a strike. We circled for ten minutes, twenty, "So what?" I think. "Now we'll keep circling around or we'll fly back. But what if there's not enough fuel, what will we do? Crash? Or will we go to

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Taranto?: As it turned out, nothing terrible happened—we landed within twenty-five minutes. The strike had ended. They cheerfully announced: Here every day someone goes on strike, even small restaurants, trying to squeeze their revolution in between breakfast and lunch.

The next day, at the crack of dawn, Italian television, which has decided to film outdoors, takes me onto the roof of the Castle of the Sacred Angel, points out from that wonderful height St. Peter's Church, which I had seen only in pictures until then, and then asks what I think about all this, and what thoughts and associations the view of St. Peter's Church brings forth. I begin to babble something about architecture, art, the interaction and correlation of the styles in the last centuries of the Renaissance and the Baroque, and meanwhile, I notice that my conversation partners are not all that pleased. They ask me directly, "Well what kind of political idea comes to mind when you look at St. Peter's Church?" I, naturally, answer that I'm not quite used to connecting art with politics in such a straightforward fashion, and once again I see that the journalist speaking with me is extremely displeased. And he asks me, "You mean you don't feel the heavy weight that spreads from this cathedral, from this spire, to all of Italy?" To which I said that I did not know Italian customs and would not take it upon myself to solve Italian problems, but that from a purely visual standpoint I did not associate the stones of St. Peter's with any weight; moreover, if such a heavy weight did exist, we would not be talking about it together so freely, much less on television. But I am not a Marxist and can offer them no Marxist conception of architecture. Then the journalists approached me from another angle, now as an orthodox Russian who has read Dostoevsky, who, as is known, condemned Catholicism, so that at least in this respect I would say something disrespectful about the Vatican. Naturally, when you are pressured, resistance arises. I became furious, and when for the tenth time they asked what kind of political idea came to my mind when I looked at the Cathedral of St. Peter's Church, I answered that only one political idea had come to me in the course of our conversation. Namely, when the Soviet tanks come here and, as a result, Communism wins out in Italy, I wonder whether St. Peter's Church will be blown up or whether they'll turn it into

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a big antireligious museum, as has happened with us in Russia. This, of course, they did not like, and it created a scandal.

Another year . . . Naples. Evening in Naples. We were wandering along some small crooked streets, filled with vegetables, fish stands, garbage. Children were yelling, women were shouting to one another from windows along the narrow streets. Meat was cooking, car horns were honking, small cars with broken headlights maneuvered desperately along the picturesque labyrinth. Freshly washed linen flapped in the sky at every floor, on every street. Walking very coolly down the center of one street was a chicken, tied by the leg on a long string to a lamp post. Suddenly we look, and there they are—our own Lenin and Stalin, so familiar from childhood, sitting beside one another on a bench with happy faces. They're smiling at us from a huge poster. Just like in Moscow thirty years ago. About this once popular photograph, memorable to all Soviet people, evil tongues said that it was only a photomontage, done in order to turn Stalin into the best friend and true comrade-in-arms of Lenin. Then it vanished from the scene; they hid Stalin somewhere, only Lenin remained. And here they sit again together, on the same bench, and smile, and—forgive me—look at us tenderly from the wall of an Italian house. Above them on the poster was written "Long live Stalin! Long live the dictatorship of the Proletariat!"

Keeping with the degradation in present-day Russia, where the dictatorship of the proletariat has been replaced by social imperialism, the figure and deeds of Stalin are ever increasingly ennobled, and something else threatening, dictatorial. For some reason, behind this enthusiasm of young leftist Italians, I could hear the enthusiastic roar of the crowd in honor of Benito Mussolini. But meanwhile, Lenin and Stalin smiled beatifically at us from the poster, promising us Communism with a human face.

When we find ourselves in the West, at first it seems to us that everything has died. The West is so weak in comparison with the Soviet regime. In the West we feel like guests from the future, and we want to prophesy. After all, we already know how things will end. We picture free Europe as a small peninsula of the colossal Communist continent of Eurasia, which has attacked from the East—not to mention the Soviet outposts in other parts of the world. Truly, the entire political geography changed

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unrecognizably before the eyes of one generation. From the capitalistic encirclement on which the Soviet Union has been harping for so long, urging the population to labor and defense, now we find ourselves more and more in a situation of Communist encirclement. But there's another side of things, which we hardly notice at first, the power and health of the Western world, its powers of endurance, despite all the diseases, storms, and cataclysms. I was extraordinarily glad to see the soundness of the structures of this free society in the West.

We Soviet people are inclined to perceive freedom as anarchy, as the freedom of destructive forces inside man, forgetting that freedom has carried enormous creative potentials, thanks to which these Western structures have come into being. The Soviet Union is a world without structure, which in many respects is held up by commands and prohibitions of every kind. The Soviet Union, to express it graphically, is a big sack, tightly tied and filled with flour, dust, or gravel (it doesn't matter what). Untie the sack and everything will spill out. The Western world is like honeycombs. They are fastened by a multitude of partitions, at times invisible partitions. They are light, and it would seem easy to blow them down with one breath. But in reality, according to the laws of physics, honeycombs are architecturally very sound.

Correspondingly, to my great surprise, even the traditions in the West proved much more sound than those in Russia, because here the traditions are alive. Besides, these are the most varied traditions—right up to the relation of people to their homeland, to their own earth, to the traditional landscape. In Norway a construction engineer led us along the mountains and waterfalls, pointing out along the way the numerous power stations under his jurisdiction. But it turns out that they are situated so as not to spoil the landscape of Norway, something supported by the whole country, which at the slightest provocation takes offense and comes out in defense of nature. And the engineer himself, as I saw, was in love with these rocks and fjords and watched over their wild beauty as over the apple of his eye. All of this takes place without the least patriotic outcry on the theme of devotion to one's homeland. How I envied Norway! Together with the feeling of structure and culture, there is the culture of work, to which we have become so unaccustomed in Russia that I am ready to admire the work of a French butcher at the market as the work of an

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artist. In the West I discovered in an immeasurably broader sense of that which can be called the open air and space of history.

Being a Soviet man, who "creates" history and must always be in the vanguard, I as an émigré, as it is expressed by the Soviet papers, have been thrown out to the backyard of history and, seeing the garbage, no longer create anything, but only contemplate. Probably all people, sooner or later, during their lives or posthumously, end up in the backyard of history. It's just that in emigration this is more readily apparent. Somehow you understand more clearly that everything will pass. However, together with this, the multifaceted nature of life becomes more visible to the person tossed up on Western shores. An end is put to the simplistic, linear approach to history. Here you can see for yourself that history unfolds not along one fixed course, but along many routes, at times very tortuous, giving rise to a refined and fantastical pattern of various cultures, cities, and peoples. Of course, I knew about this theoretically before, but I knew it abstractly, speculatively, while here you breathe it, drink it. Moreover, the various historical layers sometimes seem to interlace. In the European West, the Middle Ages or the Renaissance don't seem so far away. Just as in Israel I suddenly noticed that the Bible becomes extraordinarily authentic. It's the authenticity of a place where all this happened. I never noticed anything of the kind in Russia. History turns out to be close by; moreover, it is interlayered with the contemporary world.

So, for example, we are in Padua, in the oldest university of Europe. On its walls, and most important, in the traditions of this university, in the form of a motto of human culture, are written only two words, *universality* and *freedom*, which struck me for some reason. I had occasion to study and teach in a university in Moscow. And it used to be so difficult to say this long word, similar to a snake—u - ni - ver - sity. I knew that all the disciplines are taught in the university, but in essence, in actuality, I had no idea how the university differed from any other institutions of higher education. Well, a few institutions of higher education, gather them together under one roof, and you end up with a university. What's the difference whether physics and philosophy and geography and geometry are studied there jointly or separately? The concept of a university as a great whole—as a unified edifice of closely related and similar sciences somewhere in the cen-

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ter playing the role of a cornerstone in history—I received in Padua. Throughout all the vicissitudes of fate it retains the image and spirit of a bastion, although its walls guard only the portraits of professors who once taught here and perfected themselves in their sciences. At first this is a bit comical. So many wise people, their wizened faces, coats of arms, names imprinted in rows. Only gradually does the seriousness of the work undertaken here and continued for centuries enter one's consciousness. Padua University accepted and invited scholars of various nationalities. It was famous and proud that Hungarians and French and Germans and Poles worked and studied there even as they do now. We even stumbled upon the portrait of one Russian in the gallery, Petr Vasilyevich Postnikov. They say that he was sent to Padua by Peter the Great, and here he defended his diploma in medicine and philosophy. Padua creates the image of a university, apart from anything else, because it conceives of itself in the form of a universality—of the whole world, without respect to political and historical boundaries. Padua rejoices, sending its scholars and students to all corners of the earth. The idea of world domination that attracts dictators is replaced here by the idea of the unity of sciences, and sciences are a unity of reason, built upon the harmony of nature or the cosmos. What is a botanist, a philologist, a historian, or a chemist? They all serve one God, science making up God's pedestal in a broader metaphysical and religious sense. I guessed at the religious consciousness of a Paduan scholar at the sight of a glass cabinet, which contained—respectfully—together with his works and portraits, his last property: his skull. It's terrifying at first. But a woman enthusiast, an archeologist by profession, acting as a guide beneath these high arches, calmly explained, "We also have left our skulls to Padua University." Shuddering at these words and glancing at the yellowed craniums of old instructors grimacing from inside the cabinet, I suddenly understood that the yellowed frontal skull bones contained here were similar to wings carrying reason to the Earth from Padua University. "And here is the department of Galileo," the young girl who was our guide through the Paduan halls said. And we saw a platform of coarsely put together, unplaned boards, similar to a scaffold, from which Galileo spoke before gathered crowds. From the walls hung banners and standards of all the departments, various colors and coats of arms but with a general code for all: Universality and Freedom.

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Then there was a meeting and talk with the Dean of Padua University. Our talk included the student riots. We saw for ourselves in Milan how this takes place. In Milan, above the Academy of Arts fluttered a red banner, and there hung a large panel, which covered the gates: *academia occupata.* The Academy of Arts was then taken over by striking students who did not want to study under their professors but only on equal basis with them. We asked with the naivete of primitive people, "What if the professors in response declare a strike on the students? What if those not wishing to study were dismissed, as ordinarily happens, for poor progress?" They waved their hands. "What do you mean? One dismissal and they would blow the university into bits, burn up the library." But in Padua, the dean of the University, an already aging electronics engineer, displayed the subtlety and knowledge of a humanitarian in his evaluation of the historical destinies of Italian and European civilization. He traced the history of Padua University back to the Middle Ages. In harking back further to Roman antiquity, he spoke in the manner of an optimist who still was in firm touch with reality. He said that this wasn't the first time Italian soil had undergone a crisis, witnessed the invasion of barbarians, remembered an eclipse of the sun of freedom, reason, and universality. "But you know," he concluded, "after the shocks, Italy has a way of always reviving. In the last resort our science and culture at some point will end up in the catacombs."

This readiness for the catacombs was doubly striking: both in the pointedness of the question on the conditions of Italian discord and in the strange proximity of this topic to our dissident experience. Suddenly I recognized the venerable Paduan dean as an old camp mate, an iron-willed man from the Russian catacomb church. Well then, if the culture of Europe is prepared for the catacombs, things aren't so bad.

We went through Southern France, summer fields, running along hills. Everything was soft and smooth for the eyes. Both the moistness of outlines and the closeness of space gave rise to a rare, self-satisfying consciousness of landscape. The horizon here in comparison with the Russian plain is also quite wide, but more formed, complete. Goggling like a barbarian, I gobbled up these contours, packed, combed like the crown of a woman's head, fields and vineyards. The body of farming, overcome by sleep beneath the sun, also made itself known. You feel the weight of

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centuries and the mortality of the body. Waking, you notice, however, that you are not simply looking to the right and left, but assimilating the landscape and gradually becoming someone else from these visions. You are not who you were yesterday, because you have become mortal.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Thank you. Are there any questions or comments from the audience?

TATYANA YANKELEVICH (Andrei Sakharov's stepdaughter): In the discussion of dissent in Russia and Eastern Europe, unfortunately, the people who were spoken about were not present—some of the names I will mention were already mentioned, but nevertheless I'd like to repeat them—Georgi Vladimov, Sergei Ride Tchudovska, Anatoly Marchenko, Tatyana Velikanova, Kovalyov, Yuri Orlov, Andrei Sakharov—all of them I'm certain would have gladly used the opportunity to come here if they had had such an opportunity. They would be interested to hear everything that was said in this conference. We here are flooded with information and often we cease to value the fruits of human intellect and labor. At the same time the Soviet dissidents and those in the other Eastern bloc countries are suffering from what one might call informational hunger, or famine, although it is probably a more wholesome feeing than that of informational indigestion. In general this conference seems an important and interesting one. The only thing I regret is that the discussion doesn't seem broad enough. Perhaps *Partisan Review* will furnish us with another valuable opportunity to discuss what an open and a closed society are, and other such highly important and interesting issues.

Since this conference is about writers, I would also like to mention a statement my father made in defense of Georgi Vladimov, who has been persecuted for quite a few years now and is in danger of arrest and further harassment. We should remember not only Vladimov, but other people who are sacrificing all they have—even their lives—for the free word and free thought. Thank you.

MR. NEWMAN: I am interested in the feelings of writers toward reality. In my opinion, the difference between the West and Russia can be determined in the following way. As Professor Daniel Bell said yesterday, in Russia literature is a very serious affair and Russian tradition requires that the writer relate very serious-

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ly to reality, without avoiding social questions. In this sense, I feel that the writer, as a teacher of society or at least of conscientious people of society, is still alive. But in the West, esthetics very often requires that artists keep aloof from reality, from vulgar reality. And in this, I think, lies the very deep gulf between ethics and poetics, if I can borrow the title of Professor Baranczak's book. And I would be interested in knowing what you think about this question. And if this is so, how do you deal with this gulf, especially when you write for the Western reader?

ANDREI SINIAVSKI: As far as I understood it, the essence of the issue is that Western writers differ from Russian writers by the fact that Russian writers connect literature with social problematics, whereas in the West this is not accepted. And the question is whether there is really a difference in this. If I were to answer, I'm afraid that we would all begin to argue. I think that Russian literature is in many respects characterized by the fact that it is one of the most spiritual literatures, tightly connecting at the same time social and moral problems with esthetics. But in my view, this bears not only positive, but the most horrifying results. For example, Russian writers went into politics, which became a religion. Take the fate of Mayakovsky. Or, like Gogol, they went into religion and ceased to be writers. So that this concern about benefiting society is a double-edged sword. I think it is the great fortune of Russian literature—what makes this literature great—but simultaneously it is a great misfortune.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I'm afraid we've run out of time. We have to travel to New York tonight, where this conference will continue tomorrow. Thank you all for coming.

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FICTION

Italo Calvino

PARK-BENCH VACATION

On his way to work each morning, Marcovaldo walked beneath the green foliage of a square with trees, a bit of public garden, isolated in the junction of four streets. He raised his eyes among the boughs of the horse chestnuts,where they were at their thickest and allowed yellow rays only to glint in the shade transparent with sap; and he listened to the racket of the sparrows, tone deaf, invisible on the branches. To him they seemed nightingales, and he said to himself: "Oh, if I could wake just once at the twitter of birds and not at the sound of the alarm and the crying of little Paolino and the yelling of my wife, Domitilla!" or else: "Oh, if I could sleep here, alone, in the midst of this cool green shade and not in my cramped, hot room; here amid the silence, not amid the snoring and sleepwalking of my whole family and the racing of trams down below in the street; here in the natural darkness of the night, not in the artificial darkness of closed blinds, streaked by the glare of headlights; oh, if I could see leaves and sky on opening my eyes!" With these thoughts every day Marcovaldo began his eight daily hours—plus overtime—as an unskilled laborer.

In one corner of the square, under a dome of horse chestnuts, there was a remote, half-hidden bench. And Marcovaldo had picked it as his own. On those summer nights, in the room where five of them slept, when he couldn't get to sleep, he would dream of the bench as a vagabond dreams of a bed in a palace. One night, quietly, while his wife snored and the children kicked in their sleep, he got out of bed, dressed, tucked his pillow under his arm, left the house and went to the square.

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There it was cool, peaceful. He was already savoring the contact of those planks, whose wood—he knew—was soft and cozy, preferable in every respect to the flattened mattress of his bed; he would look for a moment at the stars, then close his eyes in a sleep that would compensate him for all the insults of the day.

Cool and peace he found, but not the empty bench. A couple of lovers were sitting there, looking into each other's eyes. Discreetly, Marcovaldo withdrew. "It's late," he thought, "they surely won't spend the whole night outdoors! They'll come to an end of their billing and cooing."

But the two were not billing or cooing: they were quarreling. And when lovers start to quarrel there's no telling how long it will go on.

He was saying: "Why don't you admit that when you said what you said you knew you were going to hurt me and not make me happy the way you were pretending you thought?"

Marcovaldo realized it was going to last quite a while.

"No, I will not admit it," she answered, as Marcovaldo had already expected.

"Why won't you admit it?"

"I'll never admit it."

Damn, Marcovaldo thought. His pillow clutched under his arm, he went for a stroll. He went and looked at the moon, which was full, big above trees and roofs. He came back towards the bench, giving it a fairly wide berth out of fear of disturbing them, but actually hoping to irritate them a little and persuade them to go away. But they were too caught up in the argument to notice him.

"You admit it then?"

"No, no, I don't admit it in the least!"

"But what if you did admit it?"

"Even if I did admit something, I wouldn't admit what you want me to admit!"

Marcovaldo went back to look at the moon, then he went to look at a traffic light, a bit farther on. The light flashed yellow, yellow, yellow, constantly blinking on and off. Marcovaldo compared the moon with the traffic light. The moon with her mysterious pallor, also yellow, but also green, in its depths, and even blue; the traffic light with its common little yellow. And the moon, all calm, casting her light without haste, streaked now and

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then by fine wisps of clouds, which she majestically allowed to fall around her shoulders; and the traffic light meanwhile, always there, on and off, on and off, throbbing with a false vitality, but actually weary and enslaved.

He went back to see if the girl had admitted anything. Not on your life: no admission from her. In fact, she wasn't now the one who refused to admit; he was. The situation had changed completely, and it was she who kept saying to him:"Then you admit it?" and he kept saying "No." A half hour went by like this. In the end, he admitted, or she did; anyway, Marcovaldo saw them get up and walk off, hand in hand.

He ran to the bench, flung himself on it; but meanwhile, in his waiting, he had lost some of his propensity to feel the sweetness he had been expecting to find there, and his bed at home, as he now remembered it, wasn't as hard as it had been. But these were minor points; his determination to enjoy the night in the open air remained firm. He stuck his face in the pillow and prepared for sleep, the kind of sleep to which he had long become unaccustomed.

Now he had found the most comfortable position. He wouldn't have shifted a fraction of an inch for anything in the world. Too bad, though, that when he lay like this, his gaze didn't fall on a prospect of trees and sky alone, so that in sleep his eyes would close on a view of absolute natural serenity. Before him, foreshortened, a tree was followed by the sword of a general from the height of his monument, then another tree, a notice board, a third tree, and then, a bit farther, that false, flashing moon, the traffic light, still ticking off its yellow, yellow, yellow.

It must be said that Marcovaldo's nervous system had been in such poor shape lately that even when he was dead tired a trifle sufficed to keep him awake; he had only to think something was annoying him, and sleep was out of the question. And now he was annoyed by that traffic light blinking on and off. It was there in the distance, a yellow eye, winking, alone. It was nothing to bother about, but Marcovaldo must have been suffering from nervous exhaustion. He stared at that blinking and repeated to himself, "How I would sleep if that thing wasn't there! How I would sleep!'

He closed his eyes and seemed to feel, under his eyelids, that

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silly yellow blinking: he screwed his eyes shut and he could see dozens of traffic lights; he reopened his eyes, it was the same thing all over again.

He got up. He had to put some screen between himself and the traffic light. He went as far as the general's monument and looked around. At the foot of the monument there was a laurel wreath, nice and thick, but now dry and coming apart, standing on props, with a broad, faded ribbon: *"The 15th Lancers on the Anniversary of The Glorious Victory."* Marcovaldo climbed up on the pedestal, raised the wreath, and hung it on the general's sabre.

Tornaquinci, the night watchman, making his rounds, crossed the square on his bicycle; Marcovaldo hid behind the statue. Tornaquinci saw the shadow of the monument move on the ground: he stopped, filled with suspicion. He studied that wreath on the sabre: he realized something was out of place, but didn't know quite what. He aimed the beam of his flashlight up there, he read: *"The 15th Lancers on the Anniversary of The Glorious Victory."* He nodded approvingly and went away.

To give him time to go off, Marcovaldo made another turn around the square. In a nearby street, a team of workmen was repairing a switch of the tram track. At night, in the deserted streets, those little groups of men huddling in the glow of the welding torches, their voices ringing, then dying immediately, have a secret look, as of people preparing things the inhabitants of the daytime must never know. Marcovaldo approached, stood looking at the flame, the workmen's movements, with a somewhat embarrassed attention, his eyes growing smaller and smaller with sleepiness. He hunted for a cigarette in his pocket, to keep himself awake; but he had no matches. "Who'll give me a light?" he asked the workmen. "With this?" the man with the torch said, spraying a flurry of sparks.

Another workman stood up, handed him a lighted cigarette. "Do you work nights, too?"

"No, I work days," Marcovaldo said.

"Then what are you doing up at this time of night? We're about to quit."

He went back to the bench. He stretched out. Now the traffic light was hidden from his eyes; he could fall asleep, at last.

He hadn't noticed the noise, before. Now, that buzz, like a

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grim, inhaling breath, and an endless scraping, and also a scratching filled his ears completely. There is no sound more heartrending than that of a welding torch, a kind of muffled scream. Without moving, huddled as he was on the bench, his face against the crumpled pillow, Marcovaldo could find no escape, and the noise continued to conjure up the scene illuminated by the gray flame scattering golden sparks all around, the men hunkered on the ground, smoked-glass visors over their faces, the torch grasped in the hand shaken by a rapid tremor, the halo of shadow around the tool cart, the tall trellislike apparatus that reached the wires. He opened his eyes, turned on the bench, looked at the stars among the boughs. The insensitive sparrows continued sleeping up there among the leaves.

To fall asleep like a bird, to have a wing you could stick your head under, a world of branches suspended above the earthly world, barely glimpsed down below, muffled and remote. Once you begin rejecting your present state, there is no knowing where you can arrive. Now Marcovaldo, in order to sleep, needed something, but he himself didn't know quite what; at this point not even a genuine silence would have been enough. He had to have a basis of sound, softer than silence, a faint wind passing through the thick undergrowth of a forest, a murmur of water bubbling up and disappearing in a meadow.

He had an idea and he rose to his feet. It wasn't exactly an idea, because half dazed by the sleepiness that filled him, he couldn't form any thought properly; but it was like a recollection that somewhere around there was something connected with the idea of water, with its loquacious and subdued flow.

In fact, there was a fountain, nearby, a distinguished work of sculpture and hydraulics, with nymphs, fauns, river gods, who enlaced jets, cascades, a play of water. Only it was dry; at night, in summer, since the aqueduct was functioning less, they turned it off. Marcovaldo wandered around for a little while like a sleepwalker; more by instinct than by reason he knew that a tub must have a tap. A man who has a good eye can find what he is looking for even with his eyes closed. He turned on the tap: from the conchshells, from the beards, from the nostrils of the horses, great jets rose, the feigned caverns were cloaked in glistening mantles, and all this water resounded like the organ of a choir loft in the great empty square, with all the rustling and turbulence that water can

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create. The night watchman, Tornaquinci, was coming along again on his coal-black bicycle, thrusting his tickets under doorways, when he suddenly saw the whole fountain explode before his eyes like a liquid firework. He nearly fell off his seat.

Trying to open his eyes as little as possible, to retain that shred of sleep he felt he had grasped, Marcovaldo ran and flung himself again on the bench. There, now it was as if he lay on the bank of a stream, with the woods above him; he slept.

He dreamed of a dinner; the dish was covered as if to keep the pasta warm. He uncovered it and there was a dead mouse, which stank. He looked into his wife's plate: another dead mouse. Before his children, more mice, smaller, but also rotting. He uncovered the tureen and found a cat, belly in the air, and the stink woke him.

Not far away there was the garbage truck that passes at night to empty the garbage cans. He could make out in the dim glow from the headlights, the crane, cackling and jerking, the shadows of men standing on the top of the mountain of refuse, their hands guiding the receptacle attached to the pulley, emptying it into the truck, pounding it with blows of their shovels, their voices grim and jerky like the movement of the crane: "Higher... let it go... to hell with you...," with metallic clashes like opaque gongs, and then the engine picking up, slowly, only to stop a bit farther on, as the maneuver began all over again.

But by now Marcovaldo's sleep had reached a zone where sounds no longer arrived, and these, even so graceless and rasping, came as if muffled in a soft halo, perhaps because of the very consistency of the garbage packed into the trucks. It was the stink that kept him awake, the stink sharpened by an unbearable idea of stink, whereby even the sounds, those dampened and remote sounds, and the image, outlined against the light, of the truck with the crane didn't reach his mind as sound and sight but only as stink. And Marcovaldo was delirious, vainly pursuing with his nostrils' imagination the fragrance of a rose arbor.

The night watchman, Tornaquinci, felt sweat bathe his forehead as he glimpsed a human form running on all fours along a flower bed, then saw it angrily rip up some ranunculi, then disappear. But he thought it must have been either a dog, the responsibility of dogcatchers, or a hallucination, the responsibility of the alienist, or a werewolf, the responsibility of God knows who but preferably not him; and he turned the corner.

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Meanwhile, having gone back to his sleeping place, Marcovaldo pressed the bedraggled clump of ranunculi to his nose, trying to fill his sense of smell to the brim with their perfume, but he could press very little from those almost odorless flowers. Still the fragrance of dew, of earth, and of trampled grass was already a great balm. He dispelled the obsession of garbage and slept. It was dawn.

His waking was a sudden explosion of sun-filled sky above his head, a sun that virtually obliterated the leaves, then restored them gradually to his half-blinded sight. But Marcovaldo could not stay because a shiver had made him jump up: the spatter of a hydrant, which the city gardeners use for watering flower beds, made cold streams trickle down his clothes. And all around, trams were clamoring, trucks going to market, handcarts, pickups, and workers on motorbikes rushing to factories, and the metal shutters of shops being yanked up, and the blinds being rolled up at house windows whose panes were glittering. His mouth and eyes sticky, his back stiff, and one hip bruised, bewildered, Marcovaldo rushed to work.

A SATURDAY OF SUN, SAND, AND SLEEP

"For your rheumatism," the Public Health doctor had said, "this summer you should take some sand treatments." And so, one Saturday afternoon, Marcovaldo was exploring the banks of the river, looking for a place where the sand was dry and in the sun. But wherever there was sand, the river was only a clank of rusty chains; dredgers and derricks were at work: machines as old as dinosaurs digging into the river and emptying giant spoonfuls of sand into the contractors' dump trucks parked there among the willows. The conveyor line of buckets rose erect and descended overturned, and the cranes lifted on their long necks pelicanlike gullets spilling gobbets of the black muck of the riverbed. Marcovaldo bent to touch the sand, crushed it in his palm; it was wet, a mush, a mire: even where the sun had formed a dry and crumbling crust, an inch below it was still damp.

Marcovaldo's children, whom their father had brought along hoping to put them to work covering him with sand,

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couldn't contain their desire to go swimming. "Papa, Papa, we're going to dive! We're going to swim in the river!"

"Are you crazy? There's a sign: 'All swimming forbidden.' You'd drown, you'd sink like stones!" And he explained that, where the riverbed has been excavated by dredgers, there remain hollow funnels that suck the stream down in eddies or whirlpools.

"Whirlpools! Show us the whirlpools!" For the children, the word had a jolly sound.

"You can't see one; it grabs you by the foot, while you're swimming, and drags you down."

"What about that? Why doesn't it go down? Is it a fish?"

"No, it's a dead cat," Marcovaldo explained. "It floats because its belly is full of water."

"Does the whirlpool catch the cat by its tail?" Michelino asked.

The slope of the grassy bank, at a certain point, opened out in a rather flat clearing where a big sifter had been set up. Two men were sifting a pile of sand, using shovels, and with the same shovels they then loaded it on a black, shallow barge, a kind of raft, which floated there, tied to a willow. The two bearded men worked under the fierce sun, wearing hats and jackets but torn and moldy, and trousers ending in shreds at the knee, leaving legs and feet bare.

In that sand, left to dry for days and days, fine, cleansed of impurities, pale as the sand at the seaside, Marcovaldo recognized what was needed for him. But he had discovered it too late: they were already loading it onto that barge, to take it away...

No, not yet: the sandmen, having completed their loading, broke out a flask of wine, and after passing it back and forth a couple of times drinking in gulps, they lay down in the shade of the willows while the hour of greatest heat passed.

"As long as they are sleeping, I can lie down in their sand and have a sand pack!" Marcovaldo thought, and he ordered the children, in a low voice: "Quick, help me!"

He jumped on the barge, took off shirt, trousers, and shoes, and burrowed into the sand. "Cover me! With the shovel!" He said to the children. "No, not my head; I need that to breathe with. It has to stay outside. All the rest!"

For the children it was like building a sand castle. "Shall we make sand pies? No, a castle with ramparts! No, no, it makes a nice track for marbles!"

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"Go away now!" Marcovaldo huffed, from beneath his sarcophagus of sand. "No, first put a paper hat over my forehead and eyes. And then jump ashore and go play a bit farther off; otherwise the men will wake up and drive me away."

"We can tow you down the river, pulling the barge rope from the shore," Filippetto suggested, when he had already half untied the mooring.

Marcovaldo, immobilized, twisted his mouth and eyes to scold them. "If you don't go away right now, if you make me get up from here, I'll beat you with the shovel!" The kids ran off.

The sun blazed, the sand burned, and Marcovaldo, dripping sweat under his paper hat, felt, as he lay there motionless, enduring the baking, the sense of satisfaction produced by painful treatments or nasty medicines, when you think: "The worse it is, the more it's doing me good."

He dozed off, rocked by the slight current that first tautened the mooring a little, then loosened it. In this pulling to and fro, the knot, which Filippetto had already half undone, became undone altogether. And the barge laden with sand moved down the river, free.

It was the hottest hour of the afternoon. Everything slept; the man buried in the sand, the arbors over the little jetties, the deserted bridges, the houses rising, windows shuttered, above the embankments. The river was low, but the barge, driven by the current, skirted the muddy shoals which rose now and then; otherwise, a light bump on the bottom was enough to send it back into the flow of water, gradually becoming deeper.

One of these bumps made Marcovaldo open his eyes. He saw the sky charged with sunlight, the low summer clouds passing. "How they run," he thought of the clouds, "and there isn't a breath of wind!" Then he saw some electric wires: they too were running, like the clouds. He looked to one side, as much as he could, with the hundredweight of sand on top of him. The right bank was far away, green, and it was running; the left was gray, far off, also in flight. He realized he was in the midst of the river, voyaging. Nobody answered: he was alone, buried on a sand barge, adrift, without oars or rudder. He knew he should get up, try to land, call for help; but at the same time the thought that sandpacks require absolute immobility held him, made him feel committed to stay there as long as he could, so as not to lose precious instants of cure.

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At that moment he saw the bridge; and from the statues and lamps that adorned the railings, from the breadth of the arches that touched the sky, he recognized it: he hadn't realized how far he had come. And as he entered the opaque region of shade that the arches cast, he remembered the rapids. About a hundred yards beyond the bridge, the riverbed made a drop; the barge would drop down the falls and overturn, and he would be smothered by the sand, the water, the barge, with no hope of emerging alive. Still, even at that moment, his greatest concern was the sand cure, whose beneficent effects would be promptly lost.

He waited for the plunge. And it came: but it was a thud coming upwards from below. On the brink of the falls, in that dry season, shoals of mud had collected, some greening with slender clumps of cane and rushes. The barge ran aground, on all its flat keel, flinging up the whole load of sand and the man buried in it. Marcovaldo found himself hurled into the air as if by a catapult, and at that moment he saw the river below him. Or, rather: he didn't see it at all, he saw only the teeming crowd of people who filled the river.

On this Saturday afternoon, a great throng of swimmers crowded that stretch of river, where the shallow water came only up to the navel; children wallowed in it, whole classes of them, and fat women, and gentlemen who did the dead-man's float, and girls in bikinis, and young toughs who wrestled with each other, and mattresses, balls, lifesavers, inner tubes, row boats, kayaks, rubber boats, motor boats, life-saving boats, yawls from yacht clubs, fishermen with nets, fishermen with rods, old women with parasols, young ladies in straw hats, and dogs, dogs, dogs, from toy poodles to Saint Bernards: you couldn't see even an inch of the river's surface. And Marcovaldo, as he flew, was uncertain whether he would fall onto a rubber mattress or into the arms of a Junoesque matron, but of one thing he was certain: that not even a drop of water would touch him.

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William Phillips

FOUR PORTRAITS

Harold Rosenberg was too much of a maverick and too wrapped up in his own cocoon to be a reliable member of an inner core. But his intellectual style makes one think of him as a charter member of the New York literary community. My first impression of him was that of a larger, gaunter, darker, more genial Ezra Pound. Because of a stiff leg, he was usually to be seen sitting, and my earliest recollection of Rosenberg is of him in a chair in the middle of a large room in an apartment so laid out that one had to go through the room he occupied to get to any other room. There he sat, holding court, as it were, talking to everyone who passed through. He was one of the great talkers of our time, at the beginning more of a talker than a writer, though later his verbal gifts became more and more evident in his writing. Sylvia Marlowe, the harpsichordist, once said Rosenberg was a verbal magician, which was not a reference to a prose style but to a phenomenal articulateness. I rarely saw Rosenberg in a conversation he did not dominate in some way, by doing most of the talking, or designating the subject, or setting the tone. Unless crossed, he was always genial and witty. He seemingly enjoyed drinking and eating as much as talking, though all these activities appeared to be inseparable.

Rosenberg's ego was as large as his body. He always thought issues of *Partisan Review* that contained something by him were particularly good. In the forties, Harold wanted to be an editor of the magazine, and he tried to persuade me by saying that it was not fulfilling its cultural mission, which it could do only if he were an editor. The assumptions were overbearing, the manner genial. One day I brought these proposals to an end by suggesting that with his editorial vision he could start his own magazine, which would immediately outshine all others.

Rosenberg's mind could be described as literary, the

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common designation of minds that are not primarily analytical, orderly, systematic. But it might better be described as being in the French tradition, given to a rhetoric of free association, startling contrasts, and witty parallels. It is the kind of mind that makes one think of what would happen if someone on an analytic couch indulged in a free association of ideas instead of a free association of personal feelings and memories. For this reason, Rosenberg has often been dismissed as an ideological critic of painting, one whose theories were stronger than his observations. And I have heard it said by his rivals that actual paintings interfered with his ideas about them. But I think it should be pointed out that there are different kinds of criticism. Though Rosenberg cannot be classed as a formal critic, his writing about the arts has often been brilliant and original. His early description of the new painting as action painting, did not really explain the evolution of the medium, and, as Mary McCarthy pointed out in an otherwise sympathetic review, the concept of painting as a form of action leaves unanswered all the questions about quality and direction. It provides no means of distinguishing between one type of action—or painting—and another, between, say, Pollock and a pop artist. Before he died, however, Rosenberg had indicated he was aware of this problem of criteria and differentiation by his dismissal of most of the pop scene as a degeneration of the earlier abstract expressionist movement and a sign of the collapse of the idea of the avant-garde.

But despite its removal of painting from the accepted canons of criticism, what I think was most interesting about Rosenberg's theory of painting as an act was that even though it may not have sufficed as a definition of the painting, it was a remarkably suggestive characterization of the spirit animating the artistic community at the time. As an indication of Rosenberg's intellectual affinities, it might also be interesting to note that the idea of art as action had some currency in France, particularly in the writings of Sartre, who probably picked it up from Blaise Cendrars.

* * *

Perhaps the least circumscribed, the least predictable, the most difficult figure to define, was Hannah Arendt. I first met her

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sometime in the forties, I think at a party given by Schocken Books where she was working as an editor. She had recently arrived in this country from France, where she had gone from her native Germany, keeping one step ahead of the Nazis. She had difficulties with the language; in fact, for a number of years her understanding of English and her ability to use it were much less than she—or others—seemed to realize. This was most evident when she submitted something she had written and one tried to untangle the meaning from her awkward prose, which had the look of precision one associates with philosophic jargon, particularly with a German flavor, but was actually vague. Perhaps this is the special gift of German thought and writing; I recall the difficulty I once had trying to help "English" some lectures by Max Horkheimer, a leading figure in the Frankfurt school, which he delivered at Columbia University in 1944. I could not tell whether the trouble lay in the German language, the German philosophic tradition, the ambiguity and vagueness inherent in Horkheimer's attempt to reconcile Marx and Freud, or in the quality of Horkheimer's mind and in the usual difficulty of translation—or in my own shortcomings. All I know is that I was constantly struggling not only to find an English equivalent but to figure out what Horkheimer really meant. Hannah Arendt charmingly summed up the difficulties of language when I asked her where she would go if the U.S. were to become fascist. "I would stay right here," she said. "I do not want to learn another language."

Hannah Arendt was also seemingly trying to make sense out of America and its literary intellectuals—something that even native thinkers were not always able to do. But one was immediately struck by her intense alertness, as though she were actually trying to penetrate ideas or people simply by looking through them, which one associated later with the power and the originality, as well as the eccentricity, of her mind. I also remember being impressed by the unusual combination of gentleness and force which, perhaps, was her most distinguishing trait to the end of her life. It was a very strange and seductive combination: firmness of tone and strength of conviction with a soft, almost caressing manner. Even at her most insistent, when she was rejecting an idea or a person and talking louder and more impatiently, her eyes seemed to be smiling benignly. But there was never any

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doubt where she stood; and anyone who took her on in debate knew he had taken on a heavyweight and usually found out that he was overmatched. She would begin in a low-keyed, pedagogic tone, and in a gravelly voice, "Now listen here," and then go on to demolish her opponent in a mesmerizing combination of persuasion, wit, intellectual authority, and a logic that I can characterize only as a kind of insistent rhetoric.

Hannah Arendt had the quality one thinks of as originality, the ability, that is, to put ideas in a fresh form. Occasionally, this led to quirkiness or one-sidedness, as those with positivist or Marxist leanings, on the one side, and conservatives, on the other, have been quick to point out. But this might be the price one has to pay for originality. And perhaps it is ungenerous to emphasize her shortcomings at a time when so few figures come near the range and depth she strove for in her thinking.

In her personal habits, Hannah could be described as old-fashioned, almost like one's parents, without any of those affectations of style or tastes for luxury cultivated these days by successful intellectuals. Even her apartments looked quaintly European, like the apartment of someone who had not acquired the new American ways of living. (They reminded me of the immigrant look of my parent's house.) Her living rooms were small, and there was no attempt to create any decor beyond coziness and comfort. She lived quietly and modestly and did not go in for flashy or fashionable forms of experience or amusement. Nor did she make a show of gourmet cooking and serving. The last time I had dinner at her house—for about ten or twelve people—the meal was catered, but very simply, and the main course was a filet. She believed in such outdated values as friendship and loyalty, loyalty to a community as well as to people. Not long before she died, I saw Hannah at Lionel Trilling's funeral services. She did not say much, but her hurt and resigned look was a comment on the sadness of the occasion. She was not a close friend of the Trillings; in fact, they had many sharp disagreements. But I assume she felt she should be there out of respect for Lionel and a sense of belonging to the same little world.

Her thinking, however, was a coalition of opposites. She had an uncanny sense of contemporary issues and moods, but she reflected her early philosophical training by going back to traditional subjects and categories. In her basic social outlook,

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she was anti-Marxist and generally conservative, which led Marxists and pseudo-Marxists to be critical of her political theories. On the other hand, her radical stands on current political questions brought her into conflict with conservatives. And her skeptical attitude toward Israel, with whose destiny she did not identify herself as a Jew, offended both professional and amateur partisans of Israel.

So far as I know, there is no balanced analysis of Hannah Arendt's work. My own feeling is that the value of her writing lies not so much in any of her theories as the texture of her thinking and in the unexpected insights with which she handled those areas in which philosophy, history, and politics cross. Thus I am not sure that Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarianism will stand up, particularly in its failure to distinguish sufficiently between the differing origins of fascism and Stalinism. Her book on totalitarianism is a very striking illumination of the organized irrationality of the Nazi years in Germany. Her idea of the banality of evil in the study of Eichmann could be questioned, though I think the main issue is a verbal one, involving the use of the term banality in relation to evil. But the description of little men wielding large destructive forces has an enormous suggestive power, particularly for nontotalitarian countries like the United States, where corruption has become almost a way of life and is spread by little people who do not otherwise qualify as monsters. More questionable, in my opinion, are Hannah Arendt's views on revolution and her philosophy of history, which are, in effect, a rejection of Marx's philosophy of history. To be sure, to be a Marxist today is largely an act of faith—often mindless faith, in the more orthodox disciples of Marx—but Hannah Arendt sometimes swung to the other extreme, to a view of history without causality and without any mechanism for social advance beyond human intelligence and moral will.

My own relation with Hannah was warm and friendly if not intimate, except for one interlude of several years, when each of us acted out the role of the hurt and misunderstood victim. It began in 1963 when her book on Eichmann appeared. Lionel Abel called me one day to say he wanted to review the book for *Partisan Review*. He said he liked it and indicated a general sympathy with what Hannah Arendt was doing. So sympathetic

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did he seem that I said we did not want a puff and that I hoped he would be critical, too. He said yes, of course, and I forgot about it until the piece came in. It turned out to be an essay, not a review, and an assault, not a puff. The gist of Abel's piece was that she was too hard on the Jews for collaborating in their own destruction, and not hard enough on the middle rung of fascist executioners whose guilt was softened by reducing their crimes to the level of banality.

My own feeling was that there was, aside from intellectual differences and animosities, a semantic misunderstanding, perhaps a semantic confusion on Hannah Arendt's part, for it seemed to me what she meant was not that evil was banal, but that people like Eichmann, of whom there are millions all over the world, are little, banal people who, in extreme situations, where their behavior has wide social approval, are drawn into the most barbaric acts. I also thought she exaggerated the possibilities of resistance to the Nazis by the Jews in Germany and Eastern Europe. In any case, the issue was what to do about Abel's piece. I felt it was in many ways a put-down, though some of the things he said were true and certainly fell into the area of legitimate criticism. And there were also personal considerations since both Arendt and Abel were friends. In situations like this, there are no satisfactory solutions. All one can do is to look for some nonexistent middle course that preserves friendship, intellectual integrity, editorial ethics, and some undefined ideal of fairness, and then muddle through the situation while wishing that it had never happened, or that one had been more astute in foreseeing the mess that was bound to follow.

I showed the piece to Hannah, who was upset by it and clearly felt it should not be published. I asked Dwight Macdonald's opinion and he, too, thought *Partisan Review* should not print it. This surprised me for Dwight had always stood for free and open controversy, though I should add that Dwight was a friend of Hannah's and no great admirer of Lionel. I tried to get Abel to make the piece more balanced and less strident. But all this time I was under enormous pressure from Philip Rahv, who was still an editor of the magazine though not very active. Rahv did not like Arendt or what he called her conservatism and anti-Jewish bias. And he had on his side, as did Abel, the fact

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that respectable editorial practice dictated the printing of a commissioned piece unless it was libelous, or personally offensive, or intellectually below the level, or generally beyond the pale.

Admittedly, we were in the middle of a dilemma that had no clear resolution, certainly not to everyone's satisfaction. What was finally done—which was my decision—was to run Abel's piece and then open up the question in a wider discussion. In the next issue Daniel Bell tried to act as a peacemaker by judiciously weighing Abel's arguments against Arendt's thesis and lifting the whole issue to the contradiction between the ideals of justice and humanity and the more immediate questions of guilt and retribution involving the Jewish people.

In the following issue, we published comments by Mary McCarthy, Dwight Macdonald, Marie Syrkin, Irving Howe, Robert Lowell, Harold Weisberg, and myself, with a reply by Abel to his critics. Most of the comments, as I said in my piece, which was cast in the form of a letter to Mary McCarthy who had expressed some doubt about whether I would take a position on the controversy, were clever, some brilliant, but they were too polemical, too busy tripping each other up, to add much to the argument. Syrkin and Weisberg were snarling and sneering, Lowell Olympian and touching in his affection for Hannah, McCarthy brilliant, especially in the writing, and honest in stating her bias, though her division of the protagonists into Jewish and Gentile only fueled the polarization, and Macdonald journalistically sharp and agile, but going along with Mary's arguments. In my piece, I tried to be fair and judicious, but that is a thankless job, especially when extreme positions are fashionable, and it makes one look as though he is avoiding taking a strong stand. (Elizabeth Young-Bruehl's account of this incident in her biography of Arendt is neither full nor correct.)

The only tangible result of the whole controversy was that Hannah and I did not speak to each other for a few years. Hannah felt betrayed by me. And though I tried to explain that my conduct was the only proper one for an editor of a magazine that prided itself on being open to any serious view, and that you could not just kill things that had been commissioned, I could understand her reaction. Indeed, I now feel, as I have said, that our little world was deficient in friendship and loyalty and that objectivity often has been a mask for competitiveness, malice,

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and polemical zeal—for banal evils. As I recall, we made up when I suggested that we meet and talk about the whole business. We both stuck to our views, but we agreed that there should be a statute of limitations on feuds of this kind, particularly one that arose out of a single incident. We both seemed to feel we were taking the more difficult course in making up, for it was easier to fight than to be friends.

* * *

I met Doris Lessing at the home of Wayland Young, now Lord Kellet, a very able English critic and journalist. The occasion was a party where I was to get together with the British new left, which meant most of the people around the *New Left Review*, plus some literary fellow-travelers. As I said in the opening of a London letter I started to write but was never able to finish, the new left in England fitted into a large living room.

Stuart Hall, the editor of the *New Left Review*, Janet Hayes, the managing editor, Charles Taylor, Mervyn Jones, Arnold Wesker, and Doris Lessing were among those who were there. Doris was shy and self-effacing, but she was the most magnetic figure. She was short, slightly plump, plainly dressed, with long black hair flowing down behind a soft, mobile face. Her eyes, which missed nothing, seemed to contain the strength of her person. I was particularly struck by her modesty, her apparent lack of any desire to display herself, and by her very un-English flat, low-keyed talk. Most English writers I had met were either themselves upper class or had adapted to the light, witty conversational manners of the aristocracy. Doris, on the other hand, perhaps because she had come from Southern Rhodesia, played up her plebeian personality and made clear her aversion to the gay, party-going literary life of London.

Doris Lessing was also more like writers who came from the working class in her directness, in the nakedness of her ambition, and in her radical views, which were uncharacteristically lacking in ambiguity or irony. For a writer of her intelligence and independence, she was strangely literal-minded in her leftism, which echoed the more fashionable European radical attitudes, particularly the anti-Americanism in European intellectual circles.

Once I had a knockdown quarrel with Doris about

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McCarthyism, when she insisted that no one was safe from the witch hunt and that all intellectual and academic freedom in the United States was shut down. She made America sound like Russia under Stalin. I tried vainly—and angrily—to make her understand that however bad McCarthyism was, it was slipshod and scattershot, and that most liberals, indeed most of the country, were only indirectly affected by McCarthy's and the House Un-American Activities Committee's campaign against real and imaginary communists. I finally gave up, convinced it was hopeless. Having never been to the United States, she had absorbed the ideological picture of this country propagated by those who were not content to observe our real shortcomings but for obvious political reasons had to blow them up to monstrous proportions. However, she has long since moved away from her earlier left politics. The turning point was the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956.

Her politics sometimes took a more amusing and almost refreshing form when it was personalized and transformed into an assertion of individual purity. For example, I took her one day to a reception by the American embassy for Mary McCarthy. Alan Sillitoe, a confirmed leftist at the time, and his wife also came with us. From the beginning, Doris could not contain her political hostility and contempt for the affair, which, I must admit, was a bit silly and pompous. There was a receiving line to meet Mary and the American Ambassador, David Bruce, and the lavish setting, with its almost imperial splendor, was scarcely in keeping with what Mary McCarthy stood for. But she graciously accepted the formalities of the situation while Doris Lessing, I thought, overreacted by fuming against capitalism in general and American imperialism in particular. While all this invective of the class struggle was being delivered by the representative of the exploited masses, Mary McCarthy, the showpiece of the embassy, was greeting her guests, mostly liberal to leftish English writers, with a frozen smile, indicating her belief that on certain social occasions gracious manners were more important than having the correct politics.

But underneath Lessing's politics and personal style was a powerful literary drive or, perhaps I should say, an enormous ambition, for that is what seemed to come out in a very significant way. Once I asked, a bit foolishly I realized afterward, what she

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wanted most to do. I had in mind the kind of book she saw as her ideal work or the sort of life she would like to live. Her answer stunned me so, I hardly knew what to say. She said she wanted to conquer England, and she had already accomplished that. I thought of all the conquerors who had preceded her, and could scarcely find a basis of comparison with this small, gentle, soft-spoken woman.

True, Doris Lessing has been enlarged into a heroic figure by the feminists, but as she has said privately, she is not a feminist and has been somewhat embarrassed by the attempt to coopt her into a movement that is too one-sidedly ideological for her broad talents. I suppose, too, she has had to resist having her effort to realize her gifts blown up into a cause. Nor are her stories or novels feminist works, unless any work by a woman whose leading characters are women is to be taken as feminist writing—which is simply a tautology parading as cultural or literary criticism.

In terms of criticism, the question, primarily, is how good or important a writer Doris Lessing is, and, to a lesser extent, what the meaning or impact of her work is. This is not the place to deal fully with either of these questions and, as in the case of other writers with whom I have been sympathetic, I cannot be entirely objective. But it is clear that Doris Lessing is a fiction writer of considerable force, in the line of the great naturalists. Although she does not have the brute power of Zola or Dreiser or their ideological sweep, she does, like them, build her narratives slowly, by accretion, brick by brick, as though they were architectural structures. Her prose, like that of most naturalists, lacks the grace of the more symbolic writers and the inventiveness of the experimentalists. Except, perhaps, for the recent semi-science-fiction novels, she is not a child of modernism. Her themes are, of course, contemporary, and the fate of her characters is determined by the forces of the modern world, but her perspective is primarily social and does not draw heavily on the rhetorical and imaginative resources of the leading modernists. It is as a social novelist—as a post-modern writer—that Doris Lessing must be judged, and as such she is a dominant figure. After all, this was her credo: she herself argued that realism is the only literary mode for writing about contemporary life.

Recently, however, Lessing has made a remarkable switch,

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turning to the inventive and fantasy mode of science fiction as a vehicle for her social imagination. Thus there are now two literary Doris Lessings, though both her earlier and her later work express values and concerns. In any event, as a person as well as a writer, the honesty and directness of her vision—in both genres—are bound to have enormous influence on the way we see ourselves in our world today, both in fiction and in our lives.

* * *

Isaac Rosenfeld first wrote for *Partisan Review* in 1948. He had the kind of perverse and radical sensibility that would have flourished in the sixties. Unfortunately he died in 1956 before he realized his talents or found his literary place. As it was, he was cast in the wrong period, in a period, that is, when criticism was formal and narrow, and fiction was expected to be broad and naturalist, with recognizable human concerns and modes of narration. Rosenfeld's reviews and essays were involved in a form of social criticism that went back to the thirties and, at the same time, heralded the popular, media-oriented, and freewheeling counterculture of the sixties. His fiction tended to be abstract and allegorical, like an early version of Barth or Pynchon. He was also an anarchist before it became popular to be one, a premature Reichian, a prophet of the sexual revolution.

Isaac was short, stocky, roundheaded, bushy-haired. Usually warm and jovial, he had, however, a streak of rage that sometimes burst out at you. When seemingly under control, it showed itself in a curled and petulant lip, and I suspect that he was a competitive and angry man, envious of the greater success of some of his contemporaries. He was not a great talker, but a lively and eccentric one, and he loved to argue unpopular subjects and causes. He used to rail against the conservatism of the scientific establishment—he knew nothing about science—and go all out for Wilhelm Reich's orgone theories. And he went so far as to make an orgone box—it was cheaper to make than to buy one—that looked like a miniature telephone booth, in which he sat for hours, insisting that it rejuvenated him and restored his creative energies. I tried to argue with him about it at the beginning but soon gave up when I realized how much he had committed himself to this homemade therapy, and how much he was drawn to

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ideas that had something of the intellectually forbidden about them and were beyond the reach of reason and evidence. When he moved to Queens with Vasiliki, his wife, an attractive and energetic woman who indulged his eccentricities though it was not clear whether she shared them, he built a little pastoral orgone box to vitalize his vegetable garden. They had the usual suburban tomatoes, peppers, string beans, peas, and lettuce, but he kept the seeds in the orgone box before planting them, and he was sure that the orgone rays stimulated the growth of the vegetables. His Reichianism, however, was not just a fad; it was part of his thinking, and one could see in Isaac the process by which memories, ideas, neuroses, and fantasies were fused, as they were in tortured writers like Kafka or Joyce. But there was also the simple, homey side of Isaac, which displayed his Jewishness, his familial charms, his earthiness, and his deceptively mild humor and irony. His *pièce de résistance* was his translation of "The Waste Land" into Yiddish, which he would recite with the appropriate mixture of solemnity and impishness while everyone roared at the absurdity and folksiness of Eliot in Yiddish.

Rosenfeld was not only ahead of his time in his eccentricities, but he missed out by his early death on the rewards and seductions that came later to writers in the form of grants, university sinecures, advances, sales, magazine markets. At the end of his life he was beginning to move into the university circuit. Before then he was usually broke. The *Partisan Review* prize of one thousand dollars for his short novel, *The Colony*, published in 1954, was a bonanza. (Two other prizes went to Peter Taylor and George Orwell.) In 1945 I helped him get the munificent job of book editor of the *New Leader*, which paid, as I recall, fifteen dollars week. Though he was an anticommunist, this was not his main concern, and his working at the *New Leader* could not be considered an act that was ideologically inspired.

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Pico Iyer

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO BEATTIE

The *New Yorker* has long seemed to be written for, by, and about those who lead lives of quiet desperation. In its discreet, fearfully subdued stories the usual milieu is peripheral suburbia, the usual mood penumbral regret. Indeed, many of the magazine's most celebrated contributors—Salinger, Cheever, and Updike among them—are best known for coolly chronicling the sad eccentricities, plaintive longings, and quiet frustrations of their generation. The newest inheritor of this tradition, speaking for a new and peculiarly displaced generation, is Ann Beattie.

The surface details of Beattie's stories so strikingly resemble Cheever's that one might almost read them as a sequel ("Son of Cheever" perhaps). For although her characters swallow pills instead of booze; although they flee to California instead of Europe; although their hassles are those of cohabitation instead of marriage—they might well be the progeny of Cheever's well-heeled lonelyhearts, raised on expectations they frequently let down. Like their literary forefathers, Beattie's well-educated vagrants might be mistaken for the charmed and witty creatures who inhabit television ads, save that their urbanity protects their lives, like their words, from all the obvious clichés. They often reside in Connecticut and pursue moderately successful careers. They know how to drop the right names and dabble in chic tastes. And most of them are haunted by a cool sorrow, a listless despair.

For Beattie is perhaps the first and the finest laureate of that generation of Americans born to a society built on quicksand and doomed to a life in the long, ambiguous shadow of the sixties. The characters in her stories are left over from that abandoned decade, hung over with its legacy, saddled with hand-me-down customs that have gone out of style. Usually in their early thirties, they stand for all those who were neither incapacitated by Viet Nam nor unhinged by drugs, but unsettled only by their innocence of both extremes. Sprung loose from certainties without being swept up by revolution, old enough to have witnessed turmoil, yet too young to have joined or beaten it, they find themselves stranded in that famous space between two worlds, one

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dying, the other powerless to be born. Yes, they routinely—if not religiously—smoke dope, crash on sofas, sing along to Dylan, shack up, and hang out; but they also think of ardor, passion, change itself as cobwebbed anachronisms. For there is resolution in revolution; and if the sixties were a time of decisiveness, however reckless, or wayward, or violent, the seventies recoiled into hedged bets and hesitations. In the world of Beattie's people, conviction has followed convention into premature retirement; commitment is a dirty word.

The natural element of these drop-out *manqués* is therefore a kind of limbo, a no man's land. Their scruffily-hip dwellings are not in the city, but not entirely out of it. With it enough to know what they can't stand, they are not steady enough to know where they can stand. And so they are always moving, but rarely going anywhere, in flight—from reality, responsibility, normality—without a destination. Their secession from the world is more a silence than a statement. And their lack of control—they less make their lives than fall into them—is registered in the blankness, the glassy blandness of their world. As one character admits, "I'm exhausted from sitting all day, drinking, and doing nothing." Beattie's people are single mothers, would-be artists, veterans of one thousand-night stands; they are returning to nature, enduring a mid-life crisis, sifting through the bric-a-brac of past lives, unthreading the tangle of children, lovers, friends, and above all, hoping not to dissolve. All of them are, in every sense, between engagements, forever commuting between one another's homes and lives, both of which they enter and leave with casual frequency.

There is, in short, nothing holding them down or keeping them in place. Unsituated, they are unstimulated, and driven to seek not answers, but anaesthetics—therapy, TV, Valium, joints. Their main activity is refining inactivity; they space out into a druggy ether-world of thoughtless, self-enclosed oblivion. As one nameless figure remarks, "Everybody who doesn't take hold of something has something take hold of them." And Beattie evokes this atmosphere of dangling conversations between people deaf to one another's griefs with characteristic compression: her characters are constantly calling each other up, answered by machines, and left to whisper their secrets or endearments into thin air.

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Beattie has always crafted metaphors that precisely reflect such off-balance lives slipping out of control. One of her latest novels is titled *Falling in Place*; stories in this collection are called "Learning to Fall," "Gravity," "Waiting," "Afloat," and "Like Glass." They are preoccupied with weightlessness and drifting, with water and air. Characters do not sink or swim; they float, or—as the modish phrase has it—they go with the flow. It is the unspoken irony of the title story that nothing seems to be "burning"; on the contrary, Beattie marked out the frosty and fragmented terrain that has become her own with the title of her first novel—*Chilly Scenes of Winter*. Her stories are archetypally set in winter, when snow eradicates color, contour, and contrast, when fingers and lives seem numb, when people, shuddering, can claim to be cool. Hers is not, to be sure, the anorexic pallor of Joan Didion's cardiograms of stunned or shattered nerves. Nor is it the overheated whiteness of Emily Dickinson, staring so intensely at a single spot that she grows dizzy. Beattie's is the white of hospital sheets and muffled December fields; not neurosis, but paralysis.

Her parched, exhausted stories themselves seem numb. She reads them herself in a plain, flat, utterly toneless voice that suggests deadened feelings or, on occasion, a determined effort to fight back tears. Her wan sentences and neutral cadences follow one upon another with sharp, chill clarity. Wandering like their characters' days, her anodyne stories have no resolution—in part because their people can't make sense of life, in part because nothing ends in any case. As if to invert the eventful frenzy and clamorous manic swings of the world according to television, a Beattie story is naked of explosions or emphases. It has neither strain, nor looseness; neither lyricism, nor radiance, nor rhythm, nor hope. Reading it is like driving for mile after mile down a straight road through a snow-covered desert.

One of Beatie's deftest narrative tricks is to catch the blur of personal relations in today's America by plunging her reader, without introduction or reference, into a chaos of first names (uninterested in the public world, she rarely mentions surnames). Upon beginning one of her stories, it always takes a while to determine the relations between the floating soap bubbles; a child can easily be mistaken for a boy friend, a gay lover for a brother or a son. For the family circle of middle-class America has appar-

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ently imploded, and its domestic structure has been distorted and distended. People change spouses, disguises, even sexual preferences at random: thus children do not know their uncles, girls are older than their stepmothers, fathers are in love with other men, and many need calculators to count their siblings. Everybody cares about "relating" to everybody else, in part, perhaps, because relatives are unknown. Nothing is quite as it seems or as it should be: in one Beattie story, a woman shares roller coaster rides, confidences, and a joint with her husband's gay brother; in another, the narrator must try to win over her lover's teenage daughter; and in a third, a woman commiserates with her husband's live-in male lover as all three try to cope with separation.

Elsewhere, again and again, we see men boyishly wooing their children. For it is the dark and perverse paradox of this country's broken families that adults and children have effectively changed places (a phenomenon touchingly noted in the recent film *Shoot the Moon*). While all too many adults still lust after adolescence, all too many kids are thrust into a precocious maturity. Forced to fend for themselves, to walk a tightrope between the sins of their fathers and the vices of their peers, more and more children are hustled by privilege and negligence into a hard wisdom they must reluctantly assume. (The ubiquitous figure of the sage ten-year old in current movies is, alas, no exaggeration: one need only contrast the recent Scottish film *Gregory's Girl,* in which a gangly and good natured fifteen-year old, wryly mocking his own growing pains, spends the entire film in unarticulated adoration of a girl whose hand he longs to hold, with *Fast Times at Ridgemont High,* in which a group of Californians of the same age languidly deal with abortions, hard drugs, and jaded sexual appetites.) In Beattie's stories, children are knowing before they are discriminating: a six year-old refuses stories with morals, dismissing them as "kid's stuff"; a parent reads her child R.D. Laing instead of fairy tales; one nine-year old carries around a copy of Samuel Beckett. Even as these children are turning into tough little realists, their parents are tumbling into stolen romances and irresponsible rites, belatedly courting an innocence they had earlier squandered. We see them dressing up as bears, playing with Frisbees, devising quirky surprises for their lovers, and running with dogs. And we come to see that their prankish charm is only another face of their affliction, a refuge and a mask. "If the birds

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could talk," announces one nonchalant narrator, "They'd say that they didn't enjoy flying." It is sad that the children of Beattie's world are afraid, confused, disenchanted; it may be sadder that their elders are no wiser and no better off.

It cannot be denied that Beattie's stories are perfect mirror images of the protagonists and predicaments they describe. But that may be their problem. They surrender to diminished expectations; they change location and little else; they loiter and go nowhere. Because her theme so rarely varies or evolves (save for one gay and giddy *jeu d'esprit* called "Happy," an exception to prove the rule), Beattie's tales seem almost massproduced. One can say that first person narratives suit her dispassion better than third, that she seems at sea in those segments set in Los Angeles, or that stories like "Playback" have occasional epiphanies. But nearly all the off-beat tunes she plays are in the same (minor) key, and after reading a few, one feels that one could write a few. Collect some characters and name them Jason, say, or Hilary, or Barrett (not Tom, Dick, or Harry—Beattie people invariably wear slightly upper-middle class, faintly original names midway between Zowie Bowie and John Smith). Give them trendy occupations and engaging idiosyncrasies. Place their homes in the woods, and supply them with shaggy dogs, coffee, and conversations around the kitchen table. Make it a grey day in winter. Let there be a phone call from a former lover, a child from a sometime marriage. Ensure that someone takes Valium and someone refers to a gynecological operation. Write in a withered present tense and end before the conclusion.

This is not to deny or disparage Beattie's commanding talents. Her spare, soft-spoken prose is singularly observant: she can conjure up a dog without a single physical detail, so keen is her sense of gesture. She clearly knows the very pulse and heartbeat of her dreamless drifters—indeed, with her long fair hair, air of seraphic funkiness, and apparently itinerant, makeshift lifestyle she seems to belong in their midst. She performs many narrative tasks with unrivaled skill: conveying the weary braveness of children who secretly long to be children again, or the poignancy of the grown men, equally eager and equally desperate, who long to entertain them; pinning down voguish tastes, brandname allusions, and aimless dialogue; sketching pale, lead-colored skies.

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The harsh transparency of her unblinking, unstinting realism is almost photographic.

And ultimately these stories may best be regarded as a collection of photos in an album: each records a situation, revives a memory, and redeems nothing. Considering them is like consulting a doctor's x-ray of contemporary America. But unless he is impeccably sterilized, a doctor is vulnerable to the very diseases he treats; just so, the closeness of Beattie's manner to her matter can be dangerous. Privy to anomie, her stories become party to it; faithful to the details of the world, they seem treacherous to the energy and heroic idealism that are her country's saving grace. Her disciplined, level-headed realism—exemplary of the meticulous tradition she upholds—finally passes on to the reader, as if by contagion, a melancholy torpor that suffocates. And so, having paid one's respects to the tasteful and well-ordered room of her fiction, one yearns only to escape, or to fling its windows open and admit the wild, fresh air of possibility.

If You Don't Weaken

The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer
By Oscar Ameringer
Introduction by James R. Green

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Marjorie Welish

FLESH AND THE DEVIL IN FIGURE PAINTING

Sensationalism has introduced into painting a tantalizing ingredient that insists—since this is in its nature—that we take notice.

Not an international style so much as an international consensus, sensationalism in painting is flourishing partly because of the global promotion of neoexpressionism, which is often sensational in form or content, but also because it can proceed unimpeded by artistic composition from minimal and conceptual art, modes commonly said to be exhausted of vitality. But abandonment of these styles, because they are repetitious or second-rate, has as much to do with the saturation of the art market and attention by critics who once favored this art to newer or more stimulating visions. By way of reaction, sensationalism gleefully advertises sensory and psychological excesses, whereas minimalism espoused impersonal rationality. Romantic in impulse, sensational art is, however, less extreme in its exploration of sensuality or subjectivity. Rather one finds an intriguing and problematic collaboration between romantic expressivity—with its headlong, unreflective, and uncensored primitivism—and expressivity as received wisdom, which foreordains what it purports to discover. For all its ostensible excitement, much recent sensational figure painting is quite conventional, though the energy of sex and violence would beguile us into believing otherwise.

Although conspicuous in recent painting, sensationalism has ancient cultural roots. It is integral to melodrama, whether the verbal melodrama of Euripedes or the visual melodrama conveyed in the Hellenistic sculpture *Laocoon*, whose writhing gestures, writhing facial expressions, and writhing props spell out the mythic heroes' suffering and fate. Sensationalism further animates baroque sculpture, the most famous example of which is Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, where natural light enhances the illusion of the sculptural tableau seen in perspective

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and directs us to the saint's spiritual rapture in a palpably sensual installation meant to induce intense religious passion in the faithful.

Though periodically revisited, sensationalism as a phenomenon is perhaps most closely identified with the nineteenth century. Indeed, Mario Praz's landmark study, *The Romantic Agony*, would suggest sensationalism is the great romantic preoccupation. Where the baroque era celebrated the voluptuous and lavish nature of sensation, the romantic era cultivated an experimental attitude toward sensation for the imaginative and psychological benefits of, as we now say, "making strange." The erotic and perverse were chief among the romantic's delights, their illicit pleasures special for the revelation they afforded. Sex had helped trigger religious ecstasy in baroque artistic visions, but the sensuality of personal crisis was more crucial in the romantic view of things. Baudelaire, who became expert in this matter, extolled an esthetic of perversity that exposed not only the nakedness of the human soul but also, as it were, its nudity, remaining entranced by his lusts and appetites even as he tried to transcend them. The romantic artist gives great credence to sensation, if for no other reason than that sensation sharpens his sense of identity. Byron, who ravaged his own and others' lives believing this, said, "The great object of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even though in pain." The pleasure of pain, as well as the pleasure *in* pain to gain consciousness, is one of the chief uses of sensationalism inherited from the romantics and informing art in the present day.

Sensationalism is often marked by excessive gesture and action that declare the event being depicted to be no ordinary occurrence but extreme human crisis. In Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus*, crisis is imminent, and we know this by activity that, however disorderly and wild, swiftly approaches the climactic. The situation here focuses on the moment when the Assyrian satrap, on the brink of losing his besieged kingdom to the invading Babylonians, orders his favorite wives and horses slain and all his other precious possessions brought near him in a crescendo of self-destruction ending in his own immolation on a funeral pyre. In the foreground is a frieze of murder, with servants plunging knives into the satrap's prized concubines and bejewelled steed, while against these life-size figures is posed the much smaller body of the king, impassively reclining. He languishes amid the

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suicide of another concubine and servants parading forward with valuables, one among them about to set the bed where he rests ablaze. This is melodrama in full potency: Sardanapalus lives his final moment in an orgy of death brought to an unbearable emotional pitch through violent action and attitude. Alive in this work is a theatrical rhetoric that, consonant with Diderot's theory of drama, has done away with the rigid staging and set speeches of eighteenth-century aristocratic theater and courts its opposite: emotionality on a perpetually mobile stage. In the mute drama that is painting, the visual spectacle is all, the only vehicle for our emotion, and it strains all its resources to make our feelings come alive.

But contemporary critics disapproved of Delacroix's spatial flux and incongruities of perspective, as well as of the vulgarity of the drama depicted. The decorative treatment of a sadistic theme was distressing because seemingly irresponsible, morally and esthetically; and his profligacy worked against the clarity, restraint, and unity mandated by neoclassicism, whose values still held sway in the Academy. Particularly abhorrent to them was the split between foreground and background, though this structural split is calculated to underline the crucial emotional rift in the painting.

But that which was distressing to them we now find exemplary romantic style. Delacroix offers a Byronic protagonist who is decidedly melancholic where conventionally he would be grandiose, and his choice has a smoldering power to it. Not only does his conception polarize the composition into active and passive forces, but the rift between Sardanapalus's contemplative attitude and the activity swirling around him offers the possibility that what is happening to him is not historical but imagined, a psychological drama where everything portrayed is a projection of the self-dramatizing, subjective individual.

Melodrama, subjectivity, and, certainly, sensuality characterize this sensational painting. In Delacroix's conception, furthermore, the carnality of the content is expressed metaphorically through the carnality of paint, with brushwork as voluptuous and glittering as the Rubensian flesh of his nudes. For the time, however, his facture was considered sloppy and his drawing "careless." It would seem that critics of the classical persuasion, when they were not opposed to Delacroix's technique, ignored the significance of, for instance, his coloristic use of paint, verging on

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the colorature when he placed green and orange on the skin where he wanted glowing, reflected light. Here is an instance of painterly technique that is the equivalent of the rhapsodic style of writing practiced by the romantics. It is a style anticipated by Rousseau in his confessional pamphlets and by Herder in his lyrical literary criticism. This rhapsodizing was understood by its romantic audience to be heartfelt, spontaneous, and sympathetic—desired qualities believed to be lacking in the neoclassic. What Delacroix contributes, then, is no less than a visual language analogous to this verbal expressivity. The obscurity of form in the 1828 painting, however chaotic to some, only hinted at the lyrical address of the *Reprise,* painted in 1844, where the brushwork is even more careless and expressionistic—certainly less descriptive—than in the earlier painting. Now the rhapsodic surface has a sensuous life of its own, and depth of perspective from foreground to background is the suppressed, almost trivial, dimension.

Delacroix's *Sardanapalus* offers very clear evidence of the sensational in figure painting unfolding with such magnificent comprehensiveness as to constitute a vision of the sensational. This accomplishment is not exactly unique in the romantic era, however. Artistically parallel to *Sardanapalus,* Flaubert's *Salemmbô* vividly conjures an oriental rebellion and the defeat of Carthage in a turbulence that fans the erotic desires of the heroine. Its appearance in 1862 was greeted with nearly uniform hostility from critics and writers alike. Evidently, mid-nineteenth-century readers did not search beyond their frustration with estheticized history to discover the reasons for Flaubert's creative distortions.

By contrast, the now widespread acceptance of neoexpressionism suggests that, whatever else may characterize audience response to this painting, difficulty of apprehension is not at issue. Two international exhibitions have both validated and popularized what was already a proven commercial success. "A New Spirit in Painting" was a sprawling show of thirty-eight artists installed at the Royal Academy in London in the spring of 1980 including the newly discovered German, Anselm Kiefer, and the newly notorious American, Julian Schnabel, who, among other young artists, gained credibility by keeping company with Bacon, Balthus, de Kooning, Guston, Stella, Twombly, and Warhol. In the summer of 1980 "Westkunst" appeared, a mammoth and unkempt retrospective of Western art since 1939, spon-

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sored by and mounted in Cologne, and, by one estimate, covering 900 works by 250 artists. It gathered Italian new wave (Enzo Cucchi, Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia, and Mimmo Paladino, among others), German and American neoexpressionism (Jonathan Borofsky, Anselm Kiefer, Julian Schnabel, and David Salle, etc.), along with other currents in pattern painting, affiliations that included and extended beyond those covered in the earlier show. In both, the format of the historical overview gives established status to up-to-the-minute work. In "A New Spirit," to substantiate the presence of the newer, emerging generation, were Francis Bacon and Philip Guston, two among several painters whose pungently sensational art predates, if it does not directly anticipate, current sensory concerns.

Francis Bacon long ago evolved a visual formula for the chilling effect produced by the sensational treatment of a figure within a theatrical setting. By the 1940s he focused on what might be considered an inversion of Delacroix's format: a writhing figure trapped within a staunchly clinical area. Much has been said about the ambiguous status of this actual space. It is customarily interpreted as an implacable environment that is heedless of individual personal anxiety. But this existential explanation does not exhaust its possible meanings. The metaphor of theater comes to mind—in particular, the methodical utilization of it by de Sade. Infamous for their component of cruelty, de Sade's fantasies are also, as Barthes has pointed out, markedly fastidious, exacting by means of nonvarying ritual and scrupulous sexual performance.

The sensational affinity between Bacon and de Sade lies not only in its particulars, however. It lies in their common though differently realized theatrical approach to the erotic. But it is with Bacon that one witnesses a dramatic polarity between the personal vulnerability of the subject and the overtly manipulative style. The voyeuristic format of the triptych, the arenalike setting, the precision if not preciousness of the brushwork, and, certainly, the formulaic composition—all contribute to the experience of extreme dissociation of the style and the libidinous disarray of what is going on in bed or on the toilet. Even the expressionist smears developed from the futuristic code for motion are rendered so precisely that Bacon's style seems to be exacting some tribute from its figures, as if they existed for the express purpose of allowing a virtuoso performance. Bacon's craft effects a dramatic contrivance through which desire is tortured.

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Philip Guston's abstract expressionist paintings, often described as ethereal, sensitive, and contemplative, had coarsened by the mid 1960s; even so, in 1970 his art seemed suddenly to betray its former values. Offensive to most loyal followers of Guston's work was the supposed regression to figurative painting that deliberately jettisoned sensitivity for simplistic, heavy-handed caricature. By rejecting key indicators of fine art—the "art coeficients," Duchamp would say—Guston became guilty of esthetic wrongs that compounded the ethical wrong he committed in picturing the Ku Klux Klan. Unlike his own surrealist precedents for these figures painted in the thirties, such reductive depictions do not console us through an ennobling style. Rather we are left desolate, to consider Punch and Judy, the Katzenjammer kids, or Mr. Natural and their rhetoric of self-aggrandizement, stupidity, and violence. Bigotry taken lightly contributes in large measure to the sensationalism of this work.

Distraught by a society that honored the stupidity and violence attending the Democratic Convention and riot control in the late sixties, Guston returned to a pictorial mode that was both intelligible and vented his feelings. But the prime source of his outrage is the individual complicit with such a society. The self-aggrandizing ego amid its bad habits and rote behavior is the true subject of this late phase of his painting. Objects and gestures furnish the ego with an identity at once too literal and too insubstantial for belief. In the nineteenth century, Victor Hugo waxed enthusiastic over *Sardanapalus*, but thought Delacroix needed a fire to complete the story. Guston similarly cloaks his negative alter-ego in overstatement. He loads the painting with the furnishings of alienation—overdone signs whose mechanistic rhetoric signals that alienation itself is a cliché, but a cliché that is real to the subjective individual who realizes his fears and vices are stupid but coddles them even so. In Baudelaire's words:

> Stupidity, error, vice and evil
> possess our minds and waste our bodies.
> As beggars nourish lice
> we nurse our likeable remorse.

As Guston's manner develops, the psychological weight of his depictions deepens. Guston relies more and more on facture, composition, and other formal resources, and less and less on the

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shock of the Klan image, to release the monstrous emotionality of which the human being is capable. A few images, mostly mundane—heads, legs, cigarettes, paintbrushes, a whip, the sea—freely combine and imply each other, frequented by a painting technique as subtle or as startled as in his abstract expressionism, and yield what legitimately might be called Guston's mature confessional style of painting. A friend of and artistic inspiration to New York School poets, Guston also shares thematic and stylistic concerns of the so-called confessional poets, those voices who do not so much gossip about their lives as "open sources of repression."

However art may evolve stylistically, the sensational endures through the belief that only exaggerated sensory excitement can adequately express the apocalyptic extremes human beings feel. The assumption here is that climactic states of being are intrinsically excessive, demanding a pitch of sensation and feeling in keeping with such aberrant human experience. But as an epithet, "sensational" applies to works whose sense of climax, though temporarily compelling, remains unconvincing because it claims more than it realizes. While melodrama and yellow journalism urge an authentic crisis or revelation, they *deliver* instead a crisis posture of virtual but not actual revelation. Recently, special pleading for artistic hyperbole has been given in literary theory, especially the Derridaen notions of the surplus of the signifier and the exorbitance of expression that signals creative outpouring and perhaps, if not a crisis of identity, then a crisis of expression. And visual artists have increasingly aligned themselves with this thinking.

Yet one thing distinguishing current from previous sensational painting is the swaggering confidence with which artists adopt these stances: compared to their immediate predecessors, current artists are not apologetic or ambivalent towards their sensational appropriations; at any rate, they display little of the irony that might betray discomfort with their declared sensational intent. This self-assured exploitation of the sensational is an attitude anticipated by pop art, for, as a result of its esthetic intervention, superficiality of reference is now taken for granted. By 1966 Max Kozloff could speak of "an accelerating cult of enthusiasm, a movement of the sensibility which might be called 'Warholism,' in which nothing has to be proved or justified. . . ." In retrospect, one can observe that it is myth made fashionable, as in Warhol's

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depiction of Marilyn or Mao, that proves to be one of pop art's astutest insights into the dynamics of the sensational. Fashion encoded into myth or ideology is an intellectually powerful as well as a commercially viable notion that, since the 1960s, has become widely and deftly assimilated into the rhetoric of figurative signification. Often current artists employ stock responses once condemned as artistically defective but now deemed praiseworthy—indeed in some circles obligatory—indicators of the modernity of a work of art. Meanwhile, heavy reliance on mythic or other cultural clichés reinforces the conventional underpinnings of the recent sensational painting.

If Sandro Chia's *Unfinished Symphony* snares our attention, the scatological subject and willfully skittish technique are responsible. The sensationalism here lies not only in the vulgarity of its subject—a man farting—but in the fact that Chia, unlike Guston, for instance, disavows any psychological depth to the obscenity flaunted. One may ask how this young Italian justifies his entrance into figure painting if he denies any refinement, profundity, or other traditional indices of civilization. But his decorative neoprimitivism seems designed to rid painting of precisely the sophisticated and sublimated sensibility that informs European art.

Concurrent with the widening influence of pop art's superficial signification are certain ideological reinforcers of sensationalism. What is pertinent here is the materialist esthetic shared by Marxist and Freudian doctrine, which holds that man's biological nature offers the best arbiter of what is essentially human. In other words, if art is excremental, and if bodily sensation and instinct are where human expression originate, then the value of direct, impulsive sensation for creativity lies in regulating the overly sophisticated imagination and intellect of the artist steeped in tradition. The effort to expose or unearth the primitive strata of culture links Chia's Derridaen views with the natural man of Rousseau's precultural ideal. Chia so much as says that civilization burdens painting in such a way as to obscure the most natural —because uncensored—acts of human expression.

Art's histrionic portrayal of myth in Delacroix's France has parallels in Germany, where it has had an almost unbroken practice. If not periodically reenacting the myth of the battlefield, Germany shows perennial fascination with the legendary Teu-

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tonic aspects of its culture and the cleansing power of irrational forces. Anselm Kiefer is one among many young artists who revisit legend, his painted photographs metaphorically blending the heroism of war with the putatively heroic behavior that daring creativity demands of the artist. It would seem we are to construe his painting as an arena where war and art mix. For superimposed on a photograph of farmland, the murky obscurity of pigment evokes a muddy battlefield when tanks are planted on it, and, similarly, smoldering tone and gesturally uncouth brushwork suggest a war-torn plain. The artist-as-soldier sees action in such painting, if one is to believe that aggressive painting is symbolic of a creative mortal contest whose outcome is risky and unknown. "Road Marked with Sand," the painting's caption reads. Through dramatic setting and irrational, subjective technique Kiefer attempts to reinvest abstract expressionism with the romance of its storm and stress origins.

That the sentimentality of our response towards our cultural past recurs in today's art is a given. Kiefer is fully under the influence of its popularity, as a spread created for the pages of the summer 1981 issue of *Artforum* shows. The story of Gilgamesh appears in a three-part sequence of painted photographs. Inscribed "Complaint of the Holy Cedar," it retells myth in a manner at once recalling melodrama and mimicking present-day artists' performance practice. Admittedly amateurish, these artists' performances have evolved a vernacular now standard and varied, and include Joseph Beuys's (an artist with whom Kiefer studied) shamanistic interpretations of artpolitics and Eleanor Antin's playacting of childhood fantasies. Kiefer simulates the theatrical mode of dramatic alienation, disengaging belief and leaving the audience with the superficiality of the present's engagement with the past, abandoning them to romance without the inspiring myth.

With bobbinlike figures posing in niches, Jedd Garet's early theatrical paintings might have originated in Oskar Schlemmer's mechanical ballet; now, however, they have yielded to decadence. In Garet's paintings prone, serpentine figures languish on plinths beneath heavily curtained canopies, while violently decorative pattern and nauseous color schemes compound the melodramatic atmosphere. Garet's canvases gain their drama from exaggerating the tension between the antithetical qualities of offensiveness and

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slickness, a combination well known to admirers of camp, the conscious cultivation of bad taste that pop art made possible, and reinforced by new wave culture, as well as by their artworld counterparts in psychosexual performance. Garet seeks a disturbing purpose for his melodramatic decor and sometimes achieves pictures that have internalized their decor, converting it to inner, psychological space. The stylish languor exuded by Garet's recumbent figures is furthermore heavily indebted to romantic spleen. Nineteenth-century critics commonly termed the character Sardanapalus "a fashionable," a dandy bored with the unbounded luxury of his empire, and it is this sense of world weariness that pervades Garet's stylishly lugubrious compositions and nourishes their sensational impact.

Julian Schnabel's blue nude unsheathes his sword with the self-aggrandizing importance of Hugo's hero Hernami, the stiff, outstretched figure seemingly charged with a mandate to exist as art and filled with that awe-inspiring responsibility. By forceful style and material display, the canvases assume the rank of vanguard and mainstream art object all at once. Paint slathered over broken crockery or velvet, often in huge assemblage, initiates Schnabel's eye-catching entry into the history of materiality. In modern practice, forty years after bits of actual material were collaged into cubist art, Jackson Pollock stressed pigment's physicality by using paint as an adhesive for sand, broken glass, string, and other matter. Then Robert Rauschenberg stunned the art world with assemblage that refused to reconcile nature to culture. The 1970s brought the sensuous excesses of Frank Stella's kitschy, flamboyant reliefs, a notable spin-off of which were Lucas Samaras's flashy, sexy Crazy Quilts. Schnabel presents us with a typically American, conspicuous materialism that aspires to overwhelm us with sensuous presence and the fact of its own contemporaneity.

The prevalence of today's sensationally tinged figure painting derives in part from the cumulative example of influential artists who led the way. Guided by Warhol's increasingly more stylish portraits of celebrities, but also won over by Stella's decorative and campy betrayal of his own former geometry, young artists have disavowed the esthetics of economy for the esthetics of excess and extravagance, creating art whose prodigal sensuousness and violence act as preposterous but effective counter exam-

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ples to the reductive absolutes of minimal art. Since the cultural disturbances of 1968, European mentors like Joseph Beuys, whose political art has always had expressionist and nationalist leanings, have become increasingly important sources of signification for younger artists. As with romantic art, neoexpressionism and its attendant sensationalism issue from a combative attitude towards waning classicisms, and so admit of all that is inclusive, instinctual, and excessive.

In our postmodern milieu, sensationalism has flourished by researching its own tradition. We do not normally consider sensationalism traditional, but, as in romanticism, it is apparent that this enduring value is quite revered. Moreover, it permeates our cultural history and successive interpretations of that history, and in some sense attempts to reconcile our past, whose attitudes and achievements we admire, with our present, which looks askance at its own record of cultural homage to the past in neologisms of styles that are today's embarrassment. Why sensationalism is again in ascendency may then be explained by the artist's perennial search for stylistic identity in a history of style saturated with modes of being. Artists who reject minimalism's formalist and futurist outlook but believe they cannot repeat the past, only reconceive it, may, for instance, insist that the romantic notion of childhood innocence as the wellspring of creativity cannot be approached except through its displacement: through childishness or punk adolescence, perversions, so to speak, of the original value, to capture the unruliness of creativity before it settles into art and artifact. Meanwhile, they intend that their perversity or excess be read esthetically, not as the inadvertent by-product of artistic inexperience.

Indeed, the spontaneity that sensation implies in sensational painting is in increasing competition with a self-conscious approach to style. Thanks to the semiotic glorification of the reproduction and the copy, and to the postmodernist conflation of styles garnered from the past, artists can now calculate their impurity quite subtly. Again, in a kind of reflex action against minimalism, but also because many persuasive cases have been made on its behalf, postmodernism has convinced many observers that it can borrow from tradition and recuperate the past in a timeless present, stocked not with transcendent memory but with rote

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memory and assimilated norms. Put another way, many of these artists are taking quite literally Lacan's developmental notion that a human being matures and comes into his own only insofar as he has mastered the language of the culture into which he was born. In any event, it is possible to say that, while many neoexpressionists would seem by sensationalism to be rebellious, a strong sense of conventionality is shaping their nonconformist impulses.

The alarm rung by today's sensationalism is thus less desperate than it appears. No crisis of identity or knowledge is at stake when much of this identity has been anticipated by preceding styles. It is sometimes said that sexuality as distinguished from romantic love became conscious with the romantics, the sensuality of Delacroix's *Sardanapalus* launching not only desire but also subjectivity as central artistic concerns. Then, in Delacroix and Flaubert, a rampant Orientalism anticipates our postmodern revivalism, our latter-day insight that what we recreate is not the past but the present's biased and perverse view of the past. Moreover, the flagrantly sensual and esthetic art espoused by the romantics was daring precisely because it was thrust at an audience totally unprepared to find value in it.

Given the genuine boldness of romanticism and the current penchant for synthesis through art's annexation of past values, it should be no wonder that the sensuality, subjectivity, and esthetic materiality of recent art strain for our attention. The libidinous content of painting, solidly admitted since Freud, cannot hope to be as radical in its newest ramifications as were the early romantic outbursts. Similarly, that history is ancillary to art continues to be an abrasive proposal, but not as devastating as it once was, and certainly not incomprehensible. After all, what is striking about current sensationalism in painting is its lack of challenge, or, more accurately, the predictability of the challenge. Counterfeiting stylistic conventions to discuss its own history and attitudes has already proved a fruitful pursuit for painting, and occasional good work by promising artists has been forthcoming. Even so, one cannot help remark that much of the visual excitement of this younger group is, first, inherited and, second, not entirely intrinsic to the art. Rather there seems to be a compensatory exaggeration of what by now is familiar material in an effort to provoke a

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reaction from an audience beyond provoking. In this regard, such art is sensational because, while it purports to be investigative or playful, more often it postures and bluffs. What we are often confronted with is hyperbole and an ongoing popularization of the sensational sensibility, which obstruct the release of true power.

Coming in
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David Remnick

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES WRIGHT

David Remnick: I think most readers will be surprised to learn you didn't start writing until you were twenty-five years old.

Charles Wright: That's true. I was in the army in Italy in 1959 and I was given a copy of Ezra Pound's *Selected Poems.* The poems had many references to places in Northern Italy where I was stationed, so I started reading them and going to places that he mentions. One place, Lake Garda, was one of Pound's sacred places. He met Joyce there for the first time; and Catullus supposedly had a villa there. I was stationed only fifteen miles away, in Verona, and I would go out to the ruins—very romantic with all the beautiful leaves and trees—and I would read Pound's poems. And naturally, once you start liking something, whatever it is, you try to do it. I started trying to imitate him and that's how I got into writing poems. I would also go to the army base library which had Eliot, e. e. Cummings, Robert Frost, and the usual five or ten books of poetry, and that's what I read for two years until I got out of the army. Then I went to a graduate writing program at the University of Iowa. I kept my mouth shut there, listened for a couple of years, and I've been writing ever since, or trying to.

Remnick: Don't you remember having read poetry before then?

Wright: Only to a certain extent. One has to read poetry if one goes to school and takes English courses. I never studied poetry at all in college other than in the regular freshman English course. My mother had gone to the University of Mississippi, was interested in writing and, at the time, used to date William Faulkner's brother, which made for a literary aura around my house. It was never poetry, though, it was always fiction. There was always good fiction around the house. My mother was a great admirer of Jane Austen, Eudora Welty, and people like that, and so, even in high school, I was reading Thomas Wolfe and had read all of Faulkner before I graduated. In college, I read all of Dylan Thomas's prose, like *Adventures*

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in the Skin Trade and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*. So there was some background early on: it was a good thing to read books in my house. Puns and language play were also encouraged. Love of language is the primary thing for a poet even before he has anything to say. W.H. Auden said that and he was right.

Remnick: Did you do any writing before the army?

Wright: I used to try to write stories in college but I wasn't very good at it. I've always said that I am the one Southerner I know who can't tell a story. My mind doesn't seem to work that way, but in short flashes and bursts, which is more akin to writing poems. Also, the kind of language I like is much more conducive to poetry than to fiction in that it's more condensed than fiction is able to carry for the most part.

Remnick: You've said elsewhere that a poet is "stuck" with the first poet he reads and enjoys.

Wright: To a certain extent I think that's so. For instance, I know my teacher at Iowa, Donald Justice, first read Kenneth Patchen, who is so far away from Don Justice's esthetic and his whole road to and from poetry that you could hardly imagine one being more different; however, he still says he retains to this day a great affection for Kenneth Patchen because he was the first poet he read. The first poet I read who was important to me was Pound, and one tends to stick with that. He was a beautifully gifted poet, but one who had problems that I didn't really know about when I first started reading him.

Remnick: Political problems?

Wright: Yes, politically he made many missteps, shall we say, and had at least several very wrongheaded, incorrect opinions that he pushed as vigorously as he pushed anything. And perhaps he was also more professorial in his poetry than I would have liked him to be. As my experience widens and I see more things that are possible and not possible in poetry, I still think that Pound was a great poet and, so far, probably the leading figure in American poetry in this century.

Remnick: Did Williams's poetry help you at all?

Wright: I am a great admirer of Williams. I love him. You can't write poetry in this century without having read Williams, and how can you read Williams and not love him? Imagine getting that kind of simplicity, specificity, emotion, and power out of little things. He was able to do it simply—for the rest of

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us it seems too contorted. But I would still be more in the line of Pound, Crane, and Stevens than Williams and Creeley.

Remnick: "The New Poem," which is the first poem in your trilogy of books, is, at least in part, a very political poem.

Wright: To a certain extent it mirrors or echoes W.H. Auden's statement that "poetry makes nothing happen," which I think is both true and untrue. It makes nothing happen in the world but it can make a lot happen to you and your inner life. That poem was written in 1970 toward the end of the Vietnam War. It's a political poem, and while poems against the Vietnam War were a big thing at the time, I thought that no matter how many poems you write against the war, it's not going to help *us*. It's not going to stop anything because political poetry only encourages people who think the way the poem thinks. It does not affect anyone who does not think the way the poem thinks.

Remnick: Do you ever feel any kind of burden as a poet?

Wright: I've only felt the burden once in my life. One wants one's poems to be important to other people. One is writing for oneself—I am talking to myself—but I want to be overheard. One time I got a letter from a young man after I had given a reading in California. I had read from *China Trace,* which is a book that is about spiritual anxieties and spiritual hopings for the future. He said he had decided to change his religion, to give up Christianity, because he felt I had thought so much about my own exposure to Christianity for so long and had come to such a reasoned renunciation of it and expressed it to him in such a reasonable way that he had been thinking about it for two months and had decided to do the same. That was a terrible burden. You want poems to change your life and perhaps to change other people's lives but that's a huge change. It was, at the same time, the most frightening and uplifting letter I've ever received. But that doesn't happen very often.

Remnick: You've written a trilogy of books, *Hard Freight, Bloodlines,* and *China Trace,* and you've written long poems within those collections, most notably "Skins" and "Tattoos." I think it's fair to say that the trilogy is not one poem in the way that Dante's *Commedia* is, but it is still very unusual in our times to attempt anything so comprehensive. Why do you think so few long poems are written now?

Wright: It's too hard and it takes too long; the novel; the

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movies; desire for instant recognition; the instant lives our lives have become through television; the current popularity of the "lyric" poem; it's too hard and it takes too long. One might also add that *nothing* is a poem the way the *Commedia* is a poem or one poem. It is the great triptych of literary history. My three little mice huddle in the vast shadow of its wings.

Remnick: The fifth section of "Tattoos" is one of your most skeptical poems on religion.

Wright: Not only this poem, but almost all of *Bloodlines* and *Hard Freight* are about my ten-year struggle with the Episcopal Church, from age six to sixteen. In this poem I faint at the altar as an acolyte because they wouldn't let you eat before you took communion. I must have been eleven or twelve and I just sort of keeled over. I was all right but that all seemed a little foolish to me. A ten-year-old can't eat before he takes the wafer and the wine? There's not much point in getting into that but it has given me much subject matter and has directed my life to a great extent; which is to say, had I not been forced by my mother (my father couldn't have cared less) to go to Sunday school and to church, I would not have the nature I have now. It's a little more of a spiritual nature than it might have been otherwise and I'm glad of that. Also, going to Sunday school was good because you learned the Old Testament, which you wouldn't have done otherwise. You come to know all the wonderful stories and you get to read the Bible. The greatest translation that I know of is the King James Version of the Bible. So my work is full of Christianity and ex-Christianity.

It's funny. I woke up this morning, remembering my last dream. A man came up to me in a Volvo agency and said, "You look like the kind of person who would contribute to this cause." And I turned around and he handed me these papers and said, "Here. Take this. I know you're a person who loves his mother. You'll contribute to this, won't you?" I said, "What's this? Oh yes. Maybe so. How would I make out the check?" And he said, "Just make it out to Jesus." I said, "I'm sorry. I can't do that. Please excuse me." I felt a very terrible coldness in the pit of my stomach knowing that I was doing what I shouldn't have done according to what my mother would have thought. So one grows up and one moves away but

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the thing still remains. I haven't been in church for twenty years except for funerals! "Just make it out to Jesus." I thought that was a great line.

Remnick: A Willie Nelson country music line.

Wright: Exactly.

Remnick: Could you provide some background on #14 of the "Tattoos"?

Wright: It's interesting. That was a dream poem, dreamed after having seen Diane Arbus's photographs of mentally retarded people. If you go back and look at the pictures of them dressed in sheets (it might have been Halloween), you can see where the image comes from; but it *was* a dream.

Remnick: Much of the beauty achieved in the "Tattoos" series is a result of the connections made from section to section. Generally, what is your attitude toward that technique of making connections using numbered sections?

Wright: Making connections is the impulse of all art, I think. The artist's job is to try and keep the connections from being made completely, so that the synapses can snap and spark. That is where the real connections are, in the electricity and energy that goes back and forth between the parts. When Emily Dickinson said, in a note to her sister-in-law Sue, regarding the unexpected and devastating death of little Gilbert, Emily's nephew and Sue's son, "Our little Ajax now spans the whole," she is pointing out a great synapse in her life and a connection to all art. One wonders if she might not have subconsciously died of grief a few years later. Connections are everything, but never perfect connections. Always the gap for the electricity to arc.

Remnick: I'd like to know a little about the composition of "Virgo Descending." You appear to be a very meticulous worker. Does improvisation enter your composition in the sense that Ginsberg talks about it?

Wright: No, there really isn't any improvisation. Doesn't he say "first thought, best thought"? I don't agree with that. How are you going to know what thought is best until you have worked at it? It's funny you picked "Virgo Descending" because it didn't take that long. It came right out of a dream. My dreams are usually very flashy and disjointed, as most people's

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are, like the #14 from "Tattoos," or my dream from this morning when the man approached me for the check to Jesus. "Virgo Descending" came out, though, as a very narrative dream. Obviously, I fleshed it out, but the image of seeing my grandmother, of walking through these cavernous halls, emerged very narratively. I don't know exactly, but that took only two or three days to write. Some poems, some of the little poems in *China Trace*, for instance, took a month to six weeks. So spontaneity exists in the beginning of the poem, and each time you come back to it you make little spontaneous insights into how it might be done, but there is not one long continuous writing as if it were a dictation. That never happens to me. My mind works in flashes and starts and not in continuous movements as Ginsberg's; he must have a mind like that in order to have written "Howl" in the length of time he describes or "Kaddish," which he wrote overnight at long sittings. I can't sit still for that long and still concentrate.

Remnick: When do you work?

Wright: Catch as catch can. I can't sit for that long a period. I work for an hour or two, get something down, get up, read, walk around, come back to it, try to get something else down and work on what I have. No long stretches. I envy people who can do that. A friend of mine, the poet Jon Anderson, writes out every one of his poems completely over a night and then goes back the next night and begins to rework. The first versions are done in one sitting. Never for me. No matter how long or short the poem. The one-line poem in *China Trace*, "Bygones," was the result of days of work.

Remnick: How did it start?

Wright: As a one-line poem, and then it got longer and then shrank. I thought that I could get one line with a title that made sense. I was trying to write a one-line poem—try it. It's hard as hell!

Remnick: You've tried many technical experiments. "Bygones" is only one example. Are technical experiments a real impulse to write for you?

Wright: Technical experiments are a major source of interest to me. Every poem should have something new to me in it; otherwise, it holds little interest to me as a writer. What I have to say, I say. How I say it is a continual discovery.

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Remnick: Could you talk a bit about the southernness of your voice?

Wright: I would always like to be thought of as a southern poet, even though I haven't lived there in twenty-two years. Most of what I have written about comes out of the South, or Italy. The emotions drawn on are out of the South. I'd just like to have the texture and richness of language that we've come to think of as southern.

Remnick: Do you aim for a particular and consistent voice?

Wright: You know, it's funny and it sounds so naive to say this, but I really don't. I write it down the way I hear it, as it pops into my head. I think in a metaphysical way; that's why my poems are structured that way. That's why I can believe Emily Dickinson thought the way that she wrote because I tend to also. I don't think it's weird. I could write differently if I wanted to, but that wouldn't be me. I think in metaphor. I explain things in class in metaphor. So it's not a street poetry and it's not East Tennessee hill language, which I also know. I think it was Goethe who said "genius is only naturalness"; and it is natural for me to write and think this way and unnatural any other way. Now that might be because of my background, and the level of conversation in my house, or my immersion in the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. It's not street speech and it's not salon speech either. It's some kind of speech on the outside of the stained glass window looking in.

Remnick: What does *distance* mean to you and your poetry?

Wright: Do you remember an old Colgate commercial in which the baseball pitcher Don Drysdale would throw a baseball at the announcer? He would throw the ball and it would go right up to the announcer's face and then . . . Wham! It would hit an invisible pane of lucite and fall to the ground. Well, that's the distance I want. You see it all but there is that invisible pane of glass. If it were to smash into your face, the artifice would be lost to a certain extent. That's what rescued Sylvia Plath. It's that one step back and making a character out of her suffering rather than saying, "I, I, I, Me, Me, Me" all the time. That becomes boring and merely therapy, whereas if you create your own myth, which was what Plath did or what John Ashbery does, you will convey yourself or your emotional sense more believably. Of course, that distance is a matter of taste; I

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feel that for art's sake distance should be there. But not too much. I don't want personas with emotion in the basement either.

Remnick: Isn't sentimentality a dominant problem in people's first efforts?

Wright: Yes, I think you have to know the difference between sentiment and sentimentality. It's a little like jazz—if you don't know what it is, I can't explain it to you. Again, it comes with practice, and reading, and someone pointing out to you what is sentimental. It's good practice because it becomes an emotional value. I keep going back to him, but Pound said "Poetry is the verbal expression of an emotional value." The key word, of course, is *value*. Some things are more valuable emotionally than others.

What will distinguish the possible poet from the non-possible poet is this love of language, because that is something that goes above and beyond a need to say something like, "My boyfriend went out with someone else and smoked a reefer and now I feel so bad I'm going to write this poem." Language is beyond that. Of course I keep talking about language. Poetry is not all language. What is important is what is being said—I know that—but without language it's a long dark road.

Also, to get back to sentimentality, you can't ask for an emotional response. You must elicit the emotion from the reader of the poem. The poem has to elicit the response. It becomes an object that you create and out of that has to come the response. You are not being morally fair with the poem when you are imposing on the poem; the poem takes on a life of its own once it gets started. It does the work, you can't do the work for it.

Remnick: Do you recall the composition of "Delta Traveller"?

Wright: I was in Laguna Beach, California, in a little shack in the backyard of our house in which I used to write. I had written "Tattoos" and "Skins" and I knew I wanted to write a poem about my mother and one about my father. As most of my poems do, "Delta Traveller" probably started with a rhythm rather than a structure. This was at a time when my son was two or three years old, and I had very few stretches of writing time. I would have maybe an hour or so that I could sneak in before I had to help out. That's why the poem came out in those little

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sections. Each one of them was written at a different time. I know it took somewhere between three weeks and a month. I would work on a section at a time, but what holds the poem together is that it is an elegy. It doesn't go logically from one section to another, nor would I want it to. The skull part was from a dream; the armed lawnchair was actually a chair of my mother's; she had bone cancer, therefore "bones like paint." The first part arises from the fact that I was the first child born in this particular hospital and Dr. Hurt was my doctor; the fertility business comes from a *National Geographic* I was reading. The last stanza is about nothing ever being really lost because it stays in the memory and is part of the natural process.

Remnick: But you can't pin down what started it off?

Wright: I did have in mind a poem about my mother, but that was not what started it. Something other than the desire to write the poem actually got it going. Perhaps even the word "quarternight." It's the sort of word that might get me to hearing a rhythm. I remember I read Andy Adams' *The Story of a Cowboy*, and there was a cowhand in it named Fox Quarternight. I thought that was a marvelous name and I may have been saying it to myself and the first line happened, as I was born in the early morning hours in that hospital. (Hence, "brash tongue on the tongueless ward.") That may have started it all and it flowed from there. I don't really remember but it's a good story and it could be true.

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Dan Jacobson

ON MIGRATORY WORKERS

In the South Africa of my childhood one often saw them waiting in groups on the railway stations of mining towns: the mine boys arriving, or the mine boys departing. When they came they wore blankets thrown toga style over their shoulders and hanging down to their waists; they had on their heads conical, homemade hats of plaited straw; on their feet were sandals whose soles were cut out of old motor car tires; in their earlobes were heavy, ornamented, circular plugs of wood or bone. However, it was not so much their dress as their demeanor that revealed them to be new arrivals. Even as a child I could recognize how apprehensive and expectant they were, and with what excitement and misgiving they looked around them at the wonders of some suburban station, with its brick and iron booking hall, concrete platform, and solitary nameboard painted in large block letters. Almost invariably such groups would have a fellow black set in authority over them: a big-bellied, brass-buttoned, pith-helmeted, *knobkierie*-brandishing figure, one of the mining company's own police corps. It was his job to form his charges into rows, two by two; to count them a few times; to thwack them a few times in jocular fashion on the shoulders and legs with his *knobkierie*; and then to march them off, through dusty, poverty stricken streets overlooked by mine dumps, to the "hostels" or barracks in the shadow of the mine's headgear, where they would serve out the twelve months or more of their contracts.

When the mine boys left they were clearly recognizable again, though for different reasons from before. They now wore khaki trousers, sports jackets, and zooty, wide-brimmed hats; they had guitars slung over their shoulders and shiny tin trunks at their feet; some carried portable windup gramaphones; their wrists were encircled, for ornament and protection, by wide leather straps bristling with rows of brass studs. They laughed and gazed boldly about them, and whistled at any black girls within range. They were on their way home, back to their womenfolk and children in various desertlike, overpopulated areas in the remoter corners of the country. In those days such territories were called

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the "Native reserves"; now, though their function and nature remain in many respects unaltered, they are known as the "homelands," or even as the "independent republics" of Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuta Tswana, and other such exotic-sounding titles cobbled up *ad hoc* by the South African government.

Most of the returning mine boys did not, of course, go back to the reserves for good. There were no jobs in such places, no money, no food, no excitement. Some after a few months, or a year or two, would renew their contracts with the mining companies; some would try to get similarly contracted employment with major users of unskilled labor, like the railways or the provincial and municipal councils; most, perhaps, would filter back individually to the cities and seek employment either as domestic servants (house boys) or in manufacturing. Mining aside, South Africa was not a highly industrialized country forty years ago; but the process of full-scale industrialization was well under way, and the manufacturers of bricks and car batteries, furniture and canned foods were eager to get more hands. Those among the blacks who were successful in finding work, and many who were not, would settle down in the "locations" or "townships" which surrounded every city like some random, ragged shadow of sacking, corrugated iron, and pressed mud bricks. Once they were settled, or as settled as they ever would be, they would send for their wives and children from the reserves; or they would start up wholly new families with women who were in domestic service in the city, or who had come to town in search of missing husbands and fathers, and who had themselves gone astray.

In order to prevent just such a state of affairs from developing, in order to prevent a vast shift of black population from the reserves to the periphery of the white cities, successive South African governments had put on the statute books a host of laws which went under a variety of names; influx control laws, pass laws, residence laws, master and servant laws, and so forth. (All this was before the word *apartheid* had entered the political vocabulary of the country. What the *apartheid* policies of the Afrikaner Nationalists have amounted to is an attempt to ideologize, to formalize, to intensify, and—by means of the establishment of those independent black republics within the boundaries of South Africa—to aggrandize policies that were traditional before they came to power.) The labor of the blacks was indispensable to

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the economic success of the white-owned mines and industries, and to the comfort of the white-owned households. Yet the whites dreaded the consequences of finding themselves surrounded by uncountable and perhaps uncontrollable hordes of landless, homeless, alien, uneducated blacks. For this reason, those mine boys whom I described remained the model or ideal type of black laborer within the economy of the country. True, there were hundreds of thousands, and later there were to be millions, of laborers who did not conform to that model; but it continued to be what the government, the civil service, the mines, some sectors of manufacturing industry, and the housewives wanted; it continued to be what the elaborate and punitive battery of laws relating to such matters was intended to produce.

In other words, white South Africa wanted to have at its disposal a labor force composed of people who would be drafted into the economy in order to fulfil specific jobs, but who would remain, so far as this could be made possible, outside the bounds of the society, or of what the white South Africans could recognize as society. The first step to achieving this end was to try to restrict severely the period in which any particular group of laborers would be present in the economy. They would be housed in barracks or dormitories which by their very nature could never become homes; their families would not be permitted to join them; when they were finished with their jobs, and their contracts ran out, they would be compelled to go back to whatever barren plateau or *donga*-riven mountainside they had come from. There they would ultimately remain out of sight, out of mind, content (it was assumed) to resume a suitably picturesque, semitribal mode of life, alongside the wives and children who had never known anything else.

All this, I was to learn as I grew older, was known as the "migratory labor system": a term which covered not merely the movement of black workers back and forth from the reserves, and their sundering from their families during the periods they were at work, but also the elaborate powers of registration, taxation, eviction, imprisonment, and job protection (for whites) which the state used in order to ensure that the movement in both directions continued. I learned also, as I grew older, that there were small but vocal groups of whites, to be found for the most part in the leftist political parties, and in places like the Institute of Race

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Relations and the English-speaking universities in Johannesburg and Cape Town, who were wholly opposed to the system on moral, social, and economic grounds.

They argued that it did not work: that for all the elaboration of the laws, and the ruthlessness with which they were applied, an ever-increasing number of blacks were in fact settling around and within the cities. But because the state did not want them to be there, because it could not acknowledge to itself that they were there, it failed to provide them with the facilities and the assistance they needed if they were to lead anything but a degraded life. And how could life not be degraded when men were forcibly separated from their wives and children, and either herded together in great, prisonlike barracks or compelled to live in hovels, in a half fugitive state, with no papers, or forged papers, or papers they could get only through bribing venial officials? What could such conditions produce but crime, drunkenness, shiftlessness, venereal disease? Could not the authorities see that the system destroyed all the family and tribal structures which had sustained the people from the reserves in the past, while at the same time it prevented them from putting down new roots and developing any sense of community in the new circumstances in which they found themselves? Did the whites, who believed that they were the beneficiaries of the system, imagine that they could escape from the consequences of what they were doing to the people among whom they had to live and work? Could they not understand that even on economic grounds the policy they were following was a shortsighted and retrograde one? Only in a half barbarous, underdeveloped demicolony could it ever have been tolerated. South African industry could never become efficient when it had to rely so heavily on a cheap but unstable labor force, which was wholly lacking in skills and which was deliberately denied the opportunity of acquiring them; industry would never find worthwhile markets for its products unless the mass of the workers who produced the goods were properly paid, decently housed, and encouraged to invest in their own future.

Such voices were, of course, in a minority among the whites; the blacks, in any case, were virtually voiceless. Among politicians and white trade unionists (who were anxious to maintain their monopoly of certain skills) other voices spoke more loudly of "improving" the system only in the sense of making it more

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foolproof or leakproof; of preventing the silt of a permanent black population from accumulating and thickening around the cities.

On one thing, however, both opponents and upholders of the system were agreed. That was in their conviction of its singularity. Nowhere else in the world were there to be found the racial, economic, and cultural conditions that had produced it. Of course, groups of migrant laborers performing specialized functions had been a familiar feature of many societies at different times: fruit pickers, for example, or corn harvesters, or sheep shearers, or plate layers, or gangs of navvies. There was even a tradition in some countries of groups of miners moving about from one seam or site to another. But the sporadic if recurrent appearance of such groups was not to be confused with what was to be found in South Africa. The patterns of race and labor relations, the economy and the law, even the geography of the country, were both factors in and functions of the migratory labor system; in one way or another it affected not just the consciousness of but the very selfhood of everyone who lived there.

All analogies are misleading; yet we could hardly understand anything that happens to us if we did not constantly try to draw them. It would be surprising if the reader in Europe or the United States did not feel that at least some important aspects of the South African system have become all too familiar to him. Forty or fifty years ago no one in South Africa could have known that within a single country, over relatively small distances, and in terms of relatively small numbers, his countrymen were pioneering a form of labor which was eventually to have parallels all over the world, and that was to involve the movement of peoples not within countries but between them, and not just between countries but between continents. Nobody, least of all those earnestly liberal or Marxist sociologists and economists in South Africa who opposed the migratory labor system, and who demonstrated conclusively (to one another) how backward it was, could have imagined that some of the most highly developed countries of the Western world would themselves come to depend on their own version of that system.

It is not on railway stations but in airports that one is perhaps most likely to see today's breed of migrant laborers actually on the move; one can see them not only in the developed countries but also in some which are merely moneyed. One group I saw about a

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year ago was squatting and lying about amid the marble, concrete, leather, tinted glass, and watery splendors of the Dubai airport terminal building, with its hanging stairs and indoor fountains. From the look of the tightly fitting, white cotton trousers on their thin legs, and the white, pudding-bowl caps on their heads, I would guess that the members of the group were Pakistanis; there were about sixty of them, all male, needless to say, the youngest about eighteen years old, the oldest perhaps forty. All of them were subdued and patient, clutching bundles in plastic bags of various shapes and sizes; all were given to glancing around curiously, but were unwilling to be seen doing so. Then there came an announcement over the loudspeaker; they evidently did not understand it and did not realize that it was addressed to them; but the uniformed policeman or official who had been detailed to look after them, and who had been sitting to one side, conscientiously nursing his nose, got to his feet and gestured to them to follow him. Together they trooped out of the building, out of the air-conditioning, and into a Gulf Airways bus waiting on the tarmac.

What they would do when they arrived at their destination, wherever it was, could be seen from the look of Dubai itself. At the edge of a flat, waveless sea, on a treeless,waterless plain the colors of the waste products of some industrial process (acidic yellow, off-white, speckled grey) was a city of innumerable high-rise apartments and motorways, interrupted at intervals by grandiose, no-expense-spared public structures: ministries, palaces, hospitals, broadcasting stations, a parliament or two, several Hiltons or their equivalents, a stadium surrounding the only green patch in the place. Firms in London or Dusseldorf or Houston undertook to put up buildings like these and their accompanying installations all over the Gulf; such contracts led to other lesser contracts, and so on, down the chain, until one of them had propelled this particular group of laborers, like countless others before them, into movement.

And then? Some would doubtless go back to Pakistan; some would stay on the Gulf; some, having got that far, would try to move farther west, to London or Düsseldorf or Houston, or any number of other such cities. Why should they not? What could keep them out? Frontier guards and passport controls would certainly deter many, but would measures like those ultimately be

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more successful than the pass laws and influx regulations with which the white South Africans had tried to keep their laborers from settling permanently in their cities? After all, it wasn't as though such would-be migrants would find themselves alone in the countries for which they were headed, if they managed to get through. Hundreds of thousands, millions indeed, from Turkey and North Africa, the West Indies, Latin America, and the Indian subcontinent had preceded them to Germany and Switzerland, Holland and Great Britain, France and the United States: to wherever, in fact, history and geography made it most convenient, or least inconvenient, for them to go. After the war, during the years of economic boom, these countries had discovered that they needed more unskilled labor than they could obtain locally. So they went farther afield to find it: some initially to Yugoslavia and south Italy; others still farther afield. The *Gastarbeiter* had come into existence; and this usefully bland term, with its combination of wishfulness and fake gentility (especially when one thinks of the kind of *Arbeit* these *Gäste* were hired to do, and the conditions in which they generally had to live) had been found for them. Like the white South Africans, each of the "host" countries had hoped that it could somehow take this kind of labor into its economy without thereby compelling its inhabitants to take the laborers into the society as well, and thus radically and irrevocably altering its aspect at every level. Like the white South Africans, again, they had intended that with the completion of the particular jobs, or series of jobs, for which these aliens had been hired, they would all go away. But like the black South Africans, only some of the newcomers had obliged by remitting their money home and then obediently going after it, never to be seen again. Others remained where they were; following and yet modifying a pattern more familiar in the New World than in the Old, they sent for their wives and children, fathers and brothers to join them; they settled in ancient slums and new *bidonvilles*, the equivalent of those previously mentioned "hostels" and "locations." They are doing so still.

When I came to live in England in the mid-fifties (thus, incidentally, becoming a migrant myself), the population of the country was racially homogenous to a remarkable degree. That was one of the features of the society which most attracted me to it, after the strains and confusions of living in South Africa. As a

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citizen of a Commonwealth country, which South Africa then was, I enjoyed an absolute right of entry and residence in Great Britain. So did millions from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Hong Kong, and a host of other, former imperial possessions. Throughout the fifties and sixties ever-increasing numbers of people from those countries were to take advantage of this right as I had done. Great Britain's "guest workers," therefore, have had from the beginning a different civic status from that of the migrants in most European countries: in effect, they were immediately regarded by British law as citizens, not foreigners. Since then successive Acts of Parliament have more and more severely restricted immigration; nevertheless the country now has a permanent "New Commonwealth" population of several million. I wish I could believe that the rights of citizenship granted to the original entrants will provide a guarantee of order and stability to the multi-racial Great Britain which has come so abruptly into existence. The omens, however, are not auspicious. The economy of the country is in a worse shape than its competitors', and it has a higher rate of chronic unemployment than their economies—two summers ago there were riots in its cities on a bigger scale than anything that has taken place recently elsewhere on the continent. However, given the scale of the transformation which has taken place over such a short period in a traditionally xenophobic country, what actually surprises me is not that there has been so much trouble in the streets of England, but that there has been so little.

Each case is of course different historically from every other, and all are different from the paradigm case I have recollected from South Africa. But they evidently have a great deal in common with one another, too. In South Africa we had centers of advanced industry and commerce which were at a distance of no more than a day and a night's rail journey from what might nowadays be called a Third World pool of labor. Those who owned the mines and shops and factories were quite distinct racially, culturally, and socially from those whom they were obliged to employ, and they were determined to remain distinct from them. What is more, the whites had total control, politically speaking, over all areas of their country, the industrialized and the undeveloped alike, and they used their powers of supervision and control with great zeal and resolution, in order to achieve the ends they desired. The

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result? Blacks make up the great majority of the permanent inhabitants of every South African city, and their proportion of the urban population as a whole grows year by year.

In effect, I am suggesting that the relationship between entire countries and peoples now resembles that which the whites of Johannesburg, say, and its neighboring towns on the gold-bearing reef of the Witwatersrand had to the blacks of the overcrowded, impoverished reserves of "homelands." Everywhere is now no more than a day and a night's plane journey from anywhere. The pull of the wealthier areas of the globe is as inexorable as the push from behind of the poorer. The results have already become evident in virtually every major city of the Western world: if South African experience is anything to go by, the process has hardly begun. In thinking about it, however, it will be necessary to get out of our minds the notion that a single exercise of will, a moral and political impulse in one direction or another ("expulsion," "integration," or whatever) will "solve the problem." Obviously governments on all sides will take the measures, with a greater or lesser degree of conviction, that seems appropriate to them. But what we are faced with is not a problem but a vast system, each of whose parts are in reciprocal relationship with one another. To put it in its most neutral, skeletal form: the skilled workers in Seattle who make jumbo jets, and the shareholders in Boeing who draw dividends from the company's sales are no more or less to blame than the unskilled migrants who will spend all their savings to fly in those very planes to the backstreets of the West. We must also not deceive ourselves that the years of recession and depression which probably lie ahead will greatly affect this movement of population, or will even manage to reverse it. It is better to be unemployed in Los Angeles or Manchester than in Mexico City or Karachi; at any rate, that is what the unemployed of Mexico City and Karachi are always likely to believe.

Not long ago I was travelling by car in the country which invented the concept of the *Gastarbeiter*, as well as certain other concepts. In some small town whose name I have forgotten—a place in Baden-Würtemberg like many others, which had the usual banks and supermarkets in concrete and anodized bronze, as a gabled, stuccoed *Gasthaus*, and a preposterously turreted *Stadthalle*, and a steepled church with its bell housed in a separate, bonnet-shaped hutch or hive at the other end of the roof—in such

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a town I found myself following two dusty, battered Opels, crammed with Turkish families who were evidently returning to Germany after a visit home (or returning home after a visit to Turkey). In each of them father sat at the wheel, mother sat at his side, grandfather or grandmother sat in the back, and in the interstices between these large bodies were children of every age. They looked with bright eyes out of the back windows; their dusky arms trailed out of the open side windows; their black heads bounced about as they played or fought with one another in the limited space available. A little later, after I had parked my car and thus lost sight of them forever, I read the following message pencilled in large letters on the wall of a public lavatory: *Aüslander vergaset wie das jüdische Verpack,* Gas the foreigners, like the Jewish rabble.

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POEMS

Three Poems by György Petri

NEWS SUMMARY

Softly accumulating like fluff
in stair corners, an epoch's filth.

TO BULCSU BERTHA, WITH PROFOUND RESPECT

In Hungary there are no poor people.
In Hungary the temporarily-stationed poor people
are not Hungarians. The kind of Hungarians who
may have joined them (see under 'Youth,' 'Alcoholics') will
anyway be amputated from the body of the nation.

In Hungary there are rich people. However these
are going to be taxed, gutted, expropriated.
This won't bring us more, but they'll have less.
Jolly good show.

In Hungary there aren't any people.
Just swarms of Hungary-uns. Against these
no measures (cheerfully instituted) are taken.
Are the authorities asleep,
heads purpled on branding inkpad pillows?

Translated from the Hungarian by Kenneth McRobbie

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A Szechenyi is what Bulcsu must become
and instead of Bridge be Lion,
who'll hitch up this nation's peasant pants,
institutionalize the family's
natural economy of hate.
He sprouts incisors in the public mouth,
announces the password: "Woe to them!"

Just one thing he can't decide:
the extent of the butchery.
You see, if there are too many of them
there won't be sufficient policemen.
But if there aren't enough
the whole thing's so piddling.
Then again who'll eliminate the police?
For surely everyone has to be eliminated.
That's the point.

VISIGOTH SUNDAYS

It was no mere Republic of Visigoths
we intended building.

Danton

in the Visigoths republic silence
from the Visigoths republic syrupy radio-music oozes
in the Visigoths republic radio-music
from the Visigoths republic syrupy silence oozes

burly neglected gas-stove women
day-dreaming in the Visigoths republic
from their firebrick-colour ripe roses
a sour-sweet milkdrop wells up sometimes
their open water-faucet husbands
dry-snortingly sleep

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in the Visigoths republic the windows are open
in the slight breeze creaking asway
the Visigoths republic's every window

Elizabeth Rees

THE 75 YEAR OLD SABBATH QUEEN

Smells of Friday in Manhattan:
challah and chicken, walk slow—
alligator cane, start pacemaker and step.
Bring sweet nuggets for the dog,
roses for blue chippendale vase.
Henry on the phone to Blanche, grieving eyes—
the rash refugees bring,
that long, low country people go afterward:
death, smells of it.

Rabbi Saul on the steps of San Francisco,
generous lips, our Hassidic tale teller.
Sees Aunt Blanche in Henry's eyes, owls,
howling dark.
Whispers: The two of you will open the ark.
Both of us to door, and Torah,
the deepest Jew in me dying, to lift the bodies.
Blanche in Henry's eyes lies down
in her afghan bed, unwraps fresh macaroons.
So many cities in this chapel.

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Got canopy and the blessing on our heads,
Sabbath down on shoulders
in white, easy feathers. Jerusalem
on fingers, and forehead,
smell Minsk in Rabbi Saul's robe.
Next year we arrive.
God loves lovers,
the apple blossoms and fruit
pushing out like babies from a scroll.

Deborah Tall

THIS WINTER

Late-moving geese cross a mackerel sky:
those clouds don't mean what I learned trans-Atlantic—
a sign to shorten sails—and on that shore
geese are happy to winter. Whatever
it means, two days later I'm stepping on
frozen puddles for the sound of breaking
and two days after that, big snow comes so
that now till May, they say, we'll see white
from every window, blindness adding itself
to blindness, till I can't see branches,
arbor or lake, though I know that even
the snowflower bears fruit, like water
become tea through leaves and patience,
and I can trust myself to this long steeping.

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INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICS

Editor's Note: The following discussion presents some of the political views and concerns of the editors of *Partisan Review*. Other reflections will appear in forthcoming issues. The comments by William Phillips, Edith Kurzweil, Steven Marcus, Leon Wieseltier, and Dennis Wrong are written in the form of responses to the observations of Peter Brooks and Morris Dickstein, but they are also meant to address some current political problems and confusions.

Morris Dickstein

A specter is haunting our political life today—not the specter of communism but the specter of our renewed obsession with communism. One of the few bright trends of the 1970s was our commitment to détente with both Russia and China and our persistent efforts to negotiate arms control agreements, imperfect as they were. Today, instead, we have a president who resorts to a theological anticommunism as a way of building popular support for vast increases in arms spending. In language unseemly for a chief of state, Reagan describes the Soviet Union as "an evil empire" and "the focus of evil in the modern world." This is no surprise in the light of Reagan's record, his love of easy simplification, and his need to pacify the extreme right on social issues without giving them anything of substance. Yet it contributes to a growing cold war climate which may have a serious impact on our own policies and those of the Russians, to say nothing of the disquiet of our European allies. Where have we heard such sweeping words since the 1950s? Will they contribute to turning a cold war into a hot one?

George Kennan has written that "we have to put an end to the often systematic condemnation of another great people and its government—a condemnation which if not stopped will really make war inevitable by making it seem inevitable." If such condemnation were merely a political tactic, its potentially inflammatory effects would still cause concern. But Reagan is doing more than defusing his evangelical supporters. He is trying to build a new consensus for a more aggressive, confrontational foreign policy. Much of this is sheer bluster, as his passive reaction to the Polish coup demonstrated. But the reversal of Carter's sensible policies in Central America shows how much our think-

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ing has shifted from negotiations to bullying, from political to military solutions, and from an interest in human rights to an obsession with communism and stability. Our expensive new weapons systems are the equivalent on a larger scale to arming and training the Somocistas for murderous raids into Nicaraguan territory. Instead of undertaking serious arms negotiations we have made cosmetic gestures designed to pacify the peace movement and shift the onus of failure to the Russians. This worked in the West German election, where the left was repudiated, largely for economic reasons; but much of European public opinion continues to run against us. Rather than galvanizing the Europeans to abandon détente and face up to the Russians, Reagan's loose talk about nuclear war has done much to frighten them and turn them against us. The currents of neutralism and anti-Americanism which we decry are partly of our own making.

If the Europeans want no part of our new cold war, the same cannot be said of American intellectuals. Recent memoirs of the 1950s evince a certain embarrassment at how the principled anti-Stalinism of the intellectuals was pre-empted by the crude demonology of Dulles, McCarthy, and HUAC. No such misgivings inhibit neoconservatives today as they abet Reagan's attempt to revive the anticommunist crusade. In more sophisticated language, their hostility to the Soviet Union is as theological and absolute as his. In these pages, Leon Weiseltier objects to Susan Sontag's equation of communism and fascism, but only because she calls it "fascism with a human face." What "human face," he asks, as if a hundred years of socialist ideals, grotesquely distorted in Soviet practice, were no different from a savage ideology of *Blut und Boden*. "The equation of communism with fascism is kind to communism," he seriously maintains. "There has not yet been a fascist government that murdered as many people as the communist government of Stalin." This numbers game is not what we would expect from a student of Jewish history. For all Stalin's vicious crimes, the systematic planning of a Final Solution was not part of his repertoire. Equating fascism with anything is close to unforgivable. But only an impassioned zealot would call the comparison "kind to communism," or complain that for Sontag "fascism is still the criterion of crime." Out of such discriminations holy wars are conceived.

Most conservative writers are concerned with more mun-

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dane wars. Despite the speculative and unreliable information we have about the Soviet weapons buildup—long-accepted percentages of the growth rate were recently revised downward by the CIA—defense-minded intellectuals have done much to foster our sense of missile gaps, windows of vulnerability, and a general decline in American power. They have helped create the illusion that big new weapons, no matter how provocative, create more deterrence. At the same time they have helped nudge our nuclear strategy from deterrence toward war fighting. As McGeorge Bundy has reminded us in the *New York Review of Books* (March 17, 1983), a weapon which aims at deterrence must meet the test of "survivability." But the MX missile "was designed to serve a governing purpose quite different from that of survivability. It was designed to be a *counterforce* weapon, one that could be used to kill Soviet missiles in their holes . . . and also to kill hard targets essential to Soviet nuclear war fighting: command posts, communications centers, and the like. In explicit doctrine MX is not a first-strike weapon; our doctrine does not say that we will ever go first in an all-out strategic exchange. But MX is a war-fighting weapon. . . . It is not a weapon that respects the first rule of deterrence."

This is the kind of thinking to which the peace movement rightly objects. It ups the ante of our already massive overkill. In a realm where appearances are crucial, what appears to be a first-strike weapon also becomes a tempting target for a first strike. Critics of the peace movement would have us believe that, wittingly or unwittingly, these protests serve Soviet aims. This too is a reversion to cold war thinking. It sees the Soviet hand in every manifestation of Western radicalism, from mindless terrorism to peaceful protest. It subjects internal dissent to a test suitable only for a wartime emergency, asking always if it weakens us in the face of a deadly adversary. It calls for positive, patriotic thinking, and brands all criticism of specific leaders and policies as "anti-Americanism."

The history of this magazine itself has been mobilized by neoconservatives to bolster their current political line. In a bizarre appendix to his engaging memoir, *The Truants*, William Barrett reprints a densely topical *Partisan Review* editorial from 1946 as if its warnings about Soviet duplicity and liberal credulity were precisely relevant thirty-five years later. More recently in *A Better*

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World, a polemical tract masquerading as history, William L. O'Neill rakes through every instance in which Stalinist or progressive writers made allowances for Soviet behavior. O'Neill's proximate targets are later chroniclers like Lillian Hellman, Vivian Gornick, and Victor Navasky who portray fellow travelers as well-meaning idealists who became victims of witch hunts and blacklists in the repressive atmosphere of the 1950's. O'Neill is not alone in criticizing their books. Each of them was greeted by a chorus of anti-Stalinist critics who rose up in rage that any virtue, passion, heroism, or even martyrdom could be imputed to American communists and their allies. Their illusions about Stalin made the fellow travelers *ipso facto* accomplices to mass murder. About such people nothing good could be said, whatever their professed devotion or actual labor for idealistic causes. It doesn't matter whether they may have been courageous about unions or racial discrimination or active in a dozen other areas against injustice or inequality. The fact that they were wrong about Stalin makes them dupes of totalitarianism, apologists for tyranny, and no more.

The same logic is being applied to the peace movement today, though it includes far fewer people who have any illusions about the Russians and it bears no resemblance to a monolithic and conspiratorial organization. The more the climate of the 1980s comes to resemble the cold war of the fifties, the more we import the scenarios of the past to explain the politics of the moment. The specter of Stalinism and anti-Stalinism hangs over this magazine today, because of its unique history, its place at the center of past intellectual debates, which recent memoirs have brought back to the fore of public attention. Many neoconservatives are eager to claim this history as their own. Others have turned arguments about Stalinism, McCarthy, or the blacklist into Aesopian versions of present-day debates. In the past year alone, the proportion of articles on communism in these pages has been staggering. The best have been by East European dissidents and émigrés who have recently experienced Soviet communism first hand. It is our duty and privilege to give these writers a forum, in order to insure that the KGB does not succeed in cutting off their tongues. But, as Solzhenitsyn's work has shown, their powerful personal testimony is no guarantee of strategic or political wisdom.

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The worst political writing has come from born-again moralists like Wieseltier, who use anticommunism as a club and as a universal litmus test that supersedes all other issues. In response to George Kennan, Wieseltier has written that "to 'put an end to the systematic condemnation' of the Soviet Union . . . is to put an end to the telling of the truth." Yet despite such self-righteousness and moral absolutism, Wieseltier has written well about nuclear arms issues in *The New Republic*. The ghost of Stalin is simply irrelevant to strategic issues today, despite the Administration's attempts to link West European protesters to the Kremlin. There are marginal segments of the peace movement which *are* pro-Soviet; they criticize only Western arms, and tacitly accept the suppression of genuine peace groups in communist countries. Our aim should be to keep the peace movement honest and independent, not to tar it with a communist brush for failing to support Pentagon policies. With all the pressures for escalation of the arms race, cloaked in an anodyne technical jargon which conceals the reality of nuclear war, we need the counter-pressures created by a peace movement, if only to remind us of the actual horrors to which our war games and scenarios might lead.

The peace movement is no more the successor to the fellow traveling ideas of the Popular Front than the neoconservatives are heirs to the independent radicalism of those who first broke with the Party. In the strained and polarized atmosphere of the 1950s, many intellectuals gave up both radicalism and liberalism to make anticommunism the keystone of their political lives. In a wide variety of well-funded organization, think tanks, and publications, some of the same people are working feverishly to provide a rationale for today's new cold war mentality.

Peter Brooks

William Phillips's "Mind Sets" (*Partisan Review, 4,* 1982), strikes me as more a distressing symptom of the current impasse of political thinking than a cogent analysis. Phillips devotes one paragraph to the confusions of the right, and the rest of his commentary to those of the left—as if the major threat to political rationality lay on the left rather than with those in

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power—and presents a portrait of the left which seems to me largely caricatural, based on a few extreme and aberrant voices rather than on the broad, if vague, consensus of the liberal left. Phillips's principal argument appears to be that one can only understand the confusions of the left in terms of "the relation of the Soviet Union to radical and liberal thinking." Further on he asks, "Why has the radical mind become an idealized parody of itself?" His answer: "The only plausible explanation is that the Soviet Union has transformed what used to be socialist doctrine into a system of political maneuvers justifying totalitarian ends but cloaked in a humanitarian and semi-socialist rhetoric." If this may describe the self-delusions of some fringe of radical know-nothings, it seems to me to revert to a diagnosis characteristic of the 1930s, one that has been revived by "neoconservative" hysteria, but really has precious little pertinence to the situation of the American left today.

For my generation, for instance, which came of age during the 1950s, the "socialism" of the Soviet Union was simply never any sort of viable political or intellectual option. The realities of Soviet totalitarianism and imperialism were so much a part of our acquired world view that liberal and even radical thought had to start from completely different bases. To the extent that socialism still made sense as a political goal, it had to go back behind what the Soviet experience had made of "socialism," to find models in American progressivism and social reform. "Socialist thought," in any classic (European) sense, has in fact been moribund in the United States for at least thirty years. In the sixties, the revolt of a younger generation against social and racial injustice and military adventurism looked for models (when it bothered with intellectual constructs at all) in the early Marx ("alienation"), and in utopian, communitarian, or anarchist views. The European student revolts of 1968 themselves drew on gestures and concepts from the nineteenth-century anarchist-libertarian and syndicalist traditions—and saw the communist parties of Western as well as Eastern Europe as part of the enemy, working with the right to disarm what was radical in the revolt, to "recuperate" it to traditional political maneuvers. It was perfectly clear at the end of the sixties that forces of protest did not at all align themselves with monolithic state socialist models.

What has changed since the end of the sixties is not so much

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left ideology— which remains a diverse mélange pragmatically focused by certain issues—but the new perception of the Soviet military threat, coupled to the emergence of a new right that exploits that threat in part to promote its selfish and simplistic social policies. The result appears to be a situation in which there is little room for rational renovation of critique from the liberal left. Phillips's argument, for example, seems to result in a version of the right's traditional "my country, right or wrong." Thus we are told that the left favors leftist forces in Latin America and Africa "regardless of their Soviet ties or their anti-American policies"; that "disarmament agitation" in the United States strengthens the hand of the other superpower; and that opposition to some of Menachem Begin's policies and concern for the Palestinians show that the left "is actually against Israel." Are these and other statements in Phillips's article to be read as an argument that the renewed cold war has somehow cut away the basis for any criticism of the policies of America and its allies? Is pro-Americanism and anticommunism once again the only test to be applied to Third World governments, and to citizens' loyalty?

Phillips states further: "In the past, radicals were able to think of politics as an internal affair, and were ready to challenge their own governments even at the cost of helping foreign ones. Now the presence of the Soviet Union rules out purely internal questions, making all questions truly international." Are we to take Phillips's "now" as disallowing any challenges to the status quo? In any event, he falsifies the history and the context of challenges offered by the left. It could in fact be plausibly argued that one of the relatively strong points of the left over the past twenty years has been its insistence upon linking domestic issues to international ones, seeing connections between the attitudes that promoted war in Vietnam and racism at home, between geopolitical actions and their socio-economic consequences, between policies in Chile and El Salvador and the fate of American cities, to take only a couple of obvious examples. Phillips asks: "How are we to understand the readiness of the left to proclaim its indignation against Salvador, while muting its objections to Afghanistan?" While I am not aware that the responsible left did "mute" its reactions to Afghanistan (the debate on Afghanistan largely concerned what American countermeasures might prove effective), the answer to Phillips's rhetorical question is so elementary he seems to

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have overlooked it: Americans have the potential to control American policies in El Salvador, but very little leverage on Soviet policies in Afghanistan. And in the name of what international algebra are we to use Soviet occupation of Afghanistan to justify our mendacious, repressive, and, I am convinced, ultimately self-defeating policies in Salvador, and in most of Latin America? Such equations as that Phillips sets up turn political thought into a right/left, for us/against us tropism. That tropism, a product of the first cold war, now revived by the second cold war, has always been a chief object of critique by the intelligent left.

To my mind, the most harmful of Phillips's caricatures concerns what he variously calls the "disarmament" and "unilateral disarmament" movements, and his criticism of the call for "negotiations" toward the limitation of nuclear arms. Since by now the roster of those calling for new approaches to arms control includes such as McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara, and Henry Kissinger, Phillips may want to revise his portrait of the arms control and nuclear freeze movements, which, though diverse and eclectic, can hardly be considered a bunch of Aldermaston marchers. It is not (if I may continue to say the obvious) that "negotiations" are "given miraculous power," but that they are the only rational approach to a situation which is daily more alarming, where the Reagan administration's refusal to pursue negotiations seriously and professionally has created a threat which now disturbs many on the right as well as on the left.

The premise that unites most of those who are currently "agitating" against American arms policies was expressed by George Kennan in an article published in *The New Yorker* a year and a half ago: "I believe that until we consent to recognize that the nuclear weapons we hold in our hands are as much a danger to us as those that repose in the hands of our supposed adversaries there will be no escape from the confusions and dilemmas to which such weapons have brought us, and must bring us increasingly as time goes on." The statement once again tries to connect international with domestic politics, to show that nuclear idolatry feeds on unmanaged fear, and to suggest that we have a measure of control over international tensions through reasoned decisions about what we need in order to be secure, and to project the image of security, that can then form the basis for rational and self-protective negotiations about the arms of others. To suggest that such

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thinking is advocacy of "unilateral disarmament" is abusive. And when Phillips assures us that "everyone is for peace," he surely begs the question: what do you mean by "peace," and how are you "for" it? What are your goals, and what are your strategies?

My basic quarrel with Phillips is his failure to analyze such questions, his use of a rhetoric which tends to support the simplistic polarizations of the extreme left and the extreme right—especially the latter, since it is the latter, after all, that holds political power in this country at this time. No one can publish a political statement without awareness of the political context, which at present is dominated by a right which equates the national interest with evangelical warfare against godless communism on the one hand, and the redistribution of national resources and power to the wealthy on the other, and which offers in the place of coherent programs the sabotage of government policies and agencies devised to protect the common good, and the subversion of rational approaches to global politics. The Reagan presidency has revealed a curious trait of the American right that the left has long misunderstood: it is not really a totalitarian right—except on questions of "morality"—and certainly not a conservative one, but more nearly an anarchist right, which in two years has done more to subvert the exercise of government and statesmanship than Nixon's deviousness or Carter's incompetence ever achieved. Yet the domestic anarchic impulse is coupled to the militaristic impulse in foreign affairs, creating a situation of unprecedented danger.

I am of course in agreement with Phillips that political thought today is full of confusions. But I think that political commentary will best transcend these confusions if it turns to preparing the way for the political debates of the post-Reagan period—assuming our survival until then—and attempts to delineate the elements of a renewed liberal left.

William Phillips

It is difficult to respond to Brooks and Dickstein because they do not present any genuine arguments or analysis. Instead they offer a brief refresher course in left attitudinizing. Hence to

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respond fully to them would require an act of textual analysis—of deconstruction—since almost every sentence contains a false assumption, a misstatement of fact, a hidden piece of ideology , or a distortion of the view of people who disagree with them, including myself.

In general, what Brooks and Dickstein are presenting in the guise of political thinking is an echo of the ideology into which a part of the left has buried its head in Germany and England. It is neither socialist, nor social democratic, nor revolutionary, nor even Marxist. It reflects that unthinking sector of radical opinion in the peace and disarmament movement that has no program for the prevention of war other than a vague call for a reduction in arms—often for unilateral disarmament. Claiming to be critical of the Soviet Union, its emphasis is anti-American. It underestimates systematically the aims and the power of the Soviet Union. It is automatically against any increase in American armament. It mocks the idea of deterrence as a preventive of nuclear war, which it seems to conceive of as an instrument of American aggression. It talks of the cold war as though it were an American invention. It exploits real and politically induced fears of a nuclear holocaust. It is above all anti-anticommunist: opposed to all varieties of anticommunism, from the liberals to the conservatives, lumping them all together for polemical purposes.

The world according to Dickstein and Brooks projects a very selective picture of what is going on today. It consists of the peace movement, disarmament, American warmongering, Salvador, Nicaragua, the Palestinians, the MX missile, the cold war liberals. This is a familiar scenario that in this country is found in such weighty and objective publications as *The Nation* and *The Village Voice*. Where are Poland, Afghanistan, Syria, the PLO, Cambodia, the Arab terrorists with links to the Soviet Union, the communist guerrillas in various part of the world, helped politically, financially, and militarily by the Cubans and other communist countries? Where is the question of the economies of America and Western Europe? Where is there any indication of interest in the survival of Western democratic society? Where is there any indication that the French socialists—and intellectuals—unlike the German and American pacifists, want to defend their country—and themselves?

This ideological ensemble draws on the moral credit of the

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radical tradition to advance views which, as I have suggested, have no genuine connection with that tradition. Such is the state of liberal opinion here that any idea presented as coming from the left is more attractive to certain intellectuals than one coming from the right. Thus Dickstein and Brooks try to discredit the views of their opponents by dismissing them as conservative. Already in the thirties, liberal and left anticommunists were stigmatized as reactionary and imperialist; and *Partisan Review* has been branded as an organ of American imperialism by those who insisted its criticism of the Soviet Union was excessive.

Parroting the line of the new pacifism, that claims there is a new "cold war," anticommunist spirit in the air, Dickstein and Brooks are simply standing things on their head. What is new is the return of the old anti-anticommunism, in the form of the peace and the antinuclear movements. It is the old Stockholm peace movement adapted to the current political situation, and shifted into high gear. The "cold war" charge is another label pinned on anticommunist liberals—for intellectuals who want a simple formula to satisfy their radical yearnings, and to assuage the public fear of war. A fuller statement of the position can be found in a recent issue of *The Nation* in a tendentious piece by Andrew Kopkind, "The New Cold War Liberals," in which Irving Howe is the new devil.

However, to this general mood that has resurrected and mobilized part of the left and has taken in a number of well-meaning but innocent people, Dickstein and Brooks have added their own misconceptions. Dickstein, for example, lumps all of Europe together when he talks about the peace movement. He does not seem to know, that, as I have indicated, France and Italy are almost free of the masochistic peace movement of Germany. Nor does he understand the deterrent and bargaining purpose of the MX, which he characterizes as a first strike weapon—ignoring the obvious fact that the United States did not go for a first strike when it had overwhelming superiority, or that democracies are generally incapable of a first strike. Dickstein also, in some tortuous reasoning about the difference between the Holocaust and Gulag, manages to play down the barbarism of the Soviets. Even if one were to grant that fascism was worse, this does not improve Stalinism, nor does it take into account that Soviet totalitarianism, not German fascism, is the threat today. And by using terms like

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theological to characterize the anticommunist position, he relegates it to a form of fanaticism. He also caricatures liberal criticism of the peace movement by amalgamating it with that of the far right by saying "it sees the Soviet hand in every manifestation of Western radicalism from mindless terrorism to peaceful protest." I do not know of any anticommunist liberal who has said that the Soviets manipulate all radical movements; the French and American socialists, for example, are outside the Soviet orbit, as are the radicals in Solidarity. Nevertheless, the Soviets are very much involved in terrorist activities. Dickstein has only to read Ann Sterling's *The Terror Network* for documentation of the intricate ties between the PLO, the Syrians, and other Arab terrorist groups with the Russians. Furthermore, Dickstein repeats the old saw that communists and fellow travelers were well-meaning idealists,—which is about as profound as saying that middle-American conservatives are often very decent people.

Brooks's contribution to current political confusion is similar to Dickstein's, but he adds a few obfuscations, including some distortions of my views. For instance, he attributes to me what he calls the right's traditional "my country right or wrong" position. The evidence?—I said that part of the left favors forces in Latin America and other parts of the world regardless of their Soviet ties and anti-American policies. He also suggests I am against any criticism of Israel. Proof?—I said that some of the opposition to Begin masks anti-Israel attitudes—which is obvious to anyone who has followed the campaign against Israel here and abroad. Furthermore, Brooks converts my criticism of the PLO into a lack of concern for the Palestinians. In general, Brooks's ideological logic leads him to assert that the renewed "cold war" has somehow cut away the basis for any criticism of the policies of America and its allies, and to ask "is pro-Americanism and anticommunism once again the only test to be applied to Third World governments and to citizens' loyalty?" Who said anything about not criticizing America and its allies or about loyalty tests? This is not only loaded polemics, but unseemly: need I indicate that my record in these respects is slightly longer and more public than Brooks's.

Brooks also misunderstands my remarks about national and international policies. What I said was that one could no longer take a position that weakened one's own country without weighing its international consequences. I cited Lenin who did not care

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whether his anti-Russian activities helped any enemy country. He was a pure internationalist. And unless Brooks is similarly unconcerned over the fate of America, or of the democratic West, he must consider the effects of advocating a policy that involves the survival of America and the West. This brings us to the question of one's relation to one's country. Obviously, one must continue to be critical and skeptical. But one wonders whether Brooks's ideological commitments are such that he sees no crucial difference between Western democracy, however faulted, and Soviet totalitarianism, and therefore considers any concern over the fate of America—or the West—as a species of right wing patriotism.

Was Brooks really unaware that the protest by most of the left against Afghanistan was muted, as compared to the protest against Salvador? Does he not know what every informed person here and abroad knows? His elementary answer that we can do something about Salvador, but nothing about Afghanistan and Poland is equally mind boggling. Is he unaware of the effect mass protests might have against Poland, or Afghanistan, or the persecution of Russian dissidents, or of Russian Jews? When Brooks talks about moral stands regardless of their practicality, are we to assume that Brooks favors only certain moral stands? And whoever said, as Brooks argues, that we use Afghanistan or Poland to justify any policies we do not believe to be wise or practical?

Brooks's rosy picture of the peace movement also belies the facts. Has he read, for example, the statement by E.P. Thompson, the leader of English pacifism, that the peace movement must be supported even if it fails to press the Soviet Union for disarmament—that disarmament of the West is sufficient? Has he not heard, as everyone in Europe knows, that the German peace movement has been financed by the East Germans?

But even more important than the polemical tactics of Brooks and Dickstein is their garbling of political reality. When they reiterate the cry for nuclear negotiations with the Russians, they don't seem to understand as Leslie Gelb pointed out recently in the *New York Times*, that everyone is for negotiations, but that negotiations simply represent the bargaining of both sides in terms of their own interests. And they confuse the issue further by identifying all American policies with Reagan; many policies have been continuous from one president to the next. Finally, Dickstein and Brooks assume that nuclear war can be prevented by slowing down armament and the development of weapons,

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even though the peace propagandists themselves argue, when it suits their purposes, that there are now enough weapons to destroy the world. The question is how to outlaw or prevent their use. The peace movement, particularly in Germany and in the U.S., plays up the fear of nuclear destruction. But by what logic is fear lessened by unilateral disarmament? Maybe the opposite is true.

In the end, there are the issues themselves, that are blurred or evaded by Brooks's and Dickstein's politics. What are their solutions to the very grave and complex problems we face, beyond grumbling about the conservatives and taking moral postures? For example, the situation in Central America presents us with a terrible dilemma. The ideal solution would be a democratic regime in El Salvador. But no one has discovered an easy way of transforming autocratic and corrupt regimes in Asia, Africa, or South America into Western democracies. Do you then simply accept their conversion into totalitarian communist regimes, which are even worse in their disregard of human rights and intellectual freedom?

Brooks and Dickstein's answer to our dilemma is to celebrate the great days of the sixties, forgetting that the sixties, though full of radical enthusiasm, came to nothing because they substituted slogans for programs, and because they ended up in terrorism, and in the very illusions about totalitarianism that, according to Brooks, they tried to shed at the beginning.

Perhaps the basic difference between myself and Brooks and Dickstein is that they do not appear to regard Soviet totalitarianism as the main political threat today—perhaps not even as a threat at all. And it is hard to know what they propose as a policy for America other than a left wing version of isolationism.

Edith Kurzweil

A specter is, in fact, haunting our political life, but it is not an obsession with communism; it is the levelling of complexities to the lowest common denominator—accentuating the legendary American naiveté—and the fear of sorting out legitimate left issues from cant. How else can one explain that Morris Dickstein does not recall that only during détente—and who would not want true détente—the balance of weapons tipped; that then as

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well the anti-Americanism of those Europeans who were brought up on it did not diminish; or that only *The Nation* and lesser left journals would consider "the mobilization of *Partisan Review* history by neoconservatives" a political issue. For William Barrett's slanted recollections would be treated factually, or would be ignored, were they not "useful" to their current ideological line.

The mobilization of history, not any longer confined to the right, now is put into the service of left causes: historians, allegedly the only ones to possess a long-range view, are to rethink all past events, "because the world may be wiped out." Every volatile situation in Latin America or Asia is compared to Vietnam in the most simplistic fashion; and it has become more acceptable to present facts selectively. I am not accusing Brooks or Dickstein of such vulgarizations, but I notice that some of their formulations fail to examine critically the motives of their friends on the left.

Many of these people are also my friends. And I do not favor some of President Reagan's policies either—his lack of concern about unemployment, cities, minorities, and his simplistic, uninformed rhetoric, which, at least in Europe, tends to be taken at face value. Nor do I think his policy towards Latin America exhibits great statesmanship. Dickstein is correct when he talks of "sheer bluster," although it is conceivable that had we actively interfered in Poland, for instance, this might have been much more of a provocation than the "anticommunist crusade." The implication that every anticommunist is a cold warrior, and the lumping of Reaganites, the moral majority, and all other rightist groups with the anticommunist left, it seems to me, is a cheap attack on those of us who hope to retain our critical faculties, who don't want to mix up wishful thinking with real politics. And its aims seem to be to put one on the defensive in a discussion.

The true issues, however, are elsewhere: and they are not the same in the various European countries as in the U.S., although the noncommunist left as well as the right do perceive the Soviet threat as central. In fact, the French socialists continue the Gaullist foreign policy, building up their *force de frappe*, insisting that they must increase this *force* because America has not kept pace with the Soviet Union. Whether part of the right, the left, or the *nouveau gauche*, the proverbial French individualism militates against facile solutions by both intellectuals and the general

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public. Conscious of the failures of the Vichy government and the pitfalls of appeasement (references to Daladier, Chamberlain, and Petain are frequently heard), the postwar anti-Americanism presently is equalled by an awareness of Soviet expansionism. That may well be why I was told in Paris, that the posters *J'aime la vie*, announcing the forthcoming peace conference in June 1983, were put up by the Communist Party. "Every Frenchman is aware that they are the only ones who gain from this initiative," stated a socialist friend. Like other countries with a strong Communist Party—a party that maintains its influence through the control of bureaucratic and academic jobs even when it has questionable motives and receives fewer votes—the French, who only lately have become aware of Gulag, Stalinism, and the various means of repression, do not question the need to defend social democracy, whether they have a socialist or Gaullist government. *Liberté, egalité, fraternité* remains meaningful, and they would rather be dead than red. This does not mean that the French are cold warriors, but that they perceive deterrence as the only way to keep the Soviets at bay, and to get them to negotiate arms reductions.

Nevertheless, the French have not abandoned their anti-Americanism in cultural matters: they continue to attack our "cultural imperialism," which allegedly ranges from Dallas and the Lone Ranger to the long defunct Congress for Cultural Freedom, and from Coca Cola to blue jeans. (In response, they now produce their own soap operas, soft drinks, and jeans, and have increased their budget for cultural initiatives so as to make any American intellectual envious.) That the French exert both economic and cultural influence upon the Third World, which contradicts this stance, is not lost upon some of their thinkers. But, politically, they see themselves as the third force, as aligned with the NATO they have no intention of joining—as a sort of backup force, should anything go wrong, should America not want to defend them. (They have maintained all along that we, and the presidents we tend to elect, are indecisive, but many of our statesmen have failed to take note.)

This "idiosyncratic" world view, which seemingly is aligned with Reagan politics in Europe and attacks American "culture," tends to be misunderstood by Americans of all stripes. Those on the right like the antipeace position, but are put off by

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the anti-American, Yankee-go-away slogans, and by the automatic backing of every Third World initiative, no matter how repressive. Those on the left, chiming in with the attacks against American imperialism elicited by our response to communist expansion in Latin America and by the remembrance of things Vietnamese, add their own gripes and slogans, which the French assimilate in their own fashion, though most of them continue to be as uninterested and uninformed about America as ever. But the left has a choice: they either try to convert a few people to their peace initiatives by scaring them with impending annihilation, or they leave for Germany.

There, the bomb scare is exacerbated by realistic fears, as well as by some of the unfortunate slogans President Reagan and a number of his advisors uttered when he first took office. Questions about the placement of the Pershing IIs no doubt triggered the debates, which, as we know, have fueled a large peace movement. But the relationship to East Germany with its hopes for reunification, the financing of peace rallies by the latter (however clandestine), as well as the fear of the Soviet SS20s which are in place and whose removal "cannot be negotiated," are the underlying motivations leading some Germans to believe that they would rather be *rot* than *tot*. Since most of the individuals are young, they are unaware of the fact that this slogan originated in the 1930s, against the fascists. Instead of being aimed at the Nazis, however, the slogan is used against America, which has become the dangerous enemy—planning "imperialist expansion."

This term, of course, was valid as long as American multinationals controlled many Third World economies, but needs to be reexamined in view of the seizure of many of their installations, the influx of Arab money, and the influx of European and Japanese enterprises. Just as their French peers, German intellectuals of the left place themselves between the two superpowers; but instead of considering themselves a third force, they abdicate. Arguing that negotiations have gotten nowhere, the more extreme ones, like their American counterparts, advocate unilateral disarmament, and say "the Russians cannot be budged in any case, so we must fight the evil in our own countries." Bolstering such statements with remembrances of fascism, well-meaning people became quite zealous at the meetings I attended. In fact, ever since I left Vienna, as a child in 1938, I had not experienced this type of fanaticism. It scared me, as I had not been scared since then, ex-

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cept maybe when the Germans bombed my school in Brussels two years later. All reasoned arguments were forgotten at these meetings, and the main theme was to avoid fascism not Soviet expansion. The participants, young intellectuals, some of whom perceive in this movement the renewal of 1968, at one point became enthusiastic enough not to note the irony when in the name of peace they contributed money for the purchase of weapons for the guerrillas in El Salvador. Nor did they ask themselves whether being ruled by the Soviets might mean the end of the freedoms they had vowed to foster after 1945.

This lack of critical thinking, to some extent, may be due to their blind acceptance of everything American after the Second World War, so that quoting American peace advocates seems natural. Some of the latter would be aghast as the positions taken in their names. The various American groups of "concerned" doctors, lawyers, psychologists, etc., whose leaders talk all over the world, after all, for the most part temper their demands for arms reduction with specific proposals and do include suggestions for negotiations. They also tend to assume that fewer arms expenditures will lead to more support for the poor, the cities, and other social amenities. But when their ideology is exported, as is customary, it turns into a super ideology that is less and less tied to reality. So when "professional" peace lovers of the world unite, they assume that all those who oppose their tactics are against peace rather than against their naive and uninformed politics. Needless to say, we all want peace, although some of us think that the best chance of achieving it is through a combination of deterrence and negotiation. That many Europeans agree, has been shown by the elections of Thatcher, Kohl, etc.—elections which are ominous insofar as the ensuing polarization leads to a situation that no longer allows for serious discussion. This tends to destabilize and weaken the countries of Western Europe, without reducing Soviet armament or removing the threat of nuclear war. Is this really what the idealists on the left want?

Steven Marcus

It is probably unfortunate that literary intellectuals persist in speaking out in print about politics. What they often offer as reasoned political argument is a mixture of pious hopes,

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weary cliches, and anger about the state of affairs in their own countries—if they are lucky enough to inhabit such countries that allow them the freedom to speak out on these matters. Hence I am reluctant to join a debate with Peter Brooks and Morris Dickstein, whose opinions, it seems to me, barely reach the pitch of discourse at which coherent argument can take place. I will not, therefore, dispute them point by point but merely offer a few observations of the simplest kind.

The cold war is not something cooked up by American administrative manipulations. It is one way of describing the state of relations that has existed now for almost forty years between the United States and its Western allies and the Soviet Union and its satellite powers. It is not going to go away. Its degrees of intensity vary from time to time, but it is the principal circumstance of foreign relations on the earth today, and it constitutes the substance of international life of much of the civilized world.

There is no such thing, outside of wishful thinking, as a "crusade" against communism as far as the United States and the West is concerned. There never has been such a concerted aggressive movement since the end of World War II. Such movements as have existed have been largely defensive, and they have failed, especially in the Third World, about as often as they have succeeded. There is, however, on the part of sections of the left in the West a clear but slow, unconscious intention to commit suicide. The latest version of this impulse is to be found in those parts of the peace movement which support unilateral disarmament—which means surrender—, neutralism, and any other strategy or international tactic which will serve to weaken the Western democracies in their long-sustained confrontation with the communist powers. Another version of this impulse is to be found in the resurgence of anti-Americanism and anti-anticommunism in some quarters of the left, especially in America, England, and West Germany today. It is no deep secret that both major parts of this confrontational world are in different states of crisis today, and that the crisis is not going to vanish tomorrow. In the West there is political freedom to one degree or another, and in most places a precariously sustained stability of democratic life; in the communist countries there is political stability sustained largely through terror, violence, the police, and prisons. In the Third World there are various forms of instability, unsavory authoritarian governments, potentially totalitarian guerilla movements,

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and a few pockets of civility and freedom. If some quarters of the left see the United States as the chief destabilizing force in the world today, one can only say that they ought to see an ophthalmologist. Indeed one of the problems of American foreign policy is that it seeks stability with such unfocused urgency that it often loses the notion of what stability actually is.

The idea of nuclear war is of course a horror. Talking about it, however, as if one were an expert on highly technical matters, and quoting one expert, or pseudo expert, or another, is not exactly a useful or uplifting way of spending one's time. The experts themselves, as far as I can tell, are in a state of utter disarray and disagreement about the technological state of affairs when it comes to nuclear weaponry. The one thing that no one seems to disagree upon, however, is that over the last twenty years the Soviet Union has increased its military strength relative to the West in significant measure. How momentous the consequences of this change in the state of international relations will be remains to be determined.

I do not see how literary or cultural liberal intellectuals can be anything except anticommunist. Not to be so is a form of symbolic suicide or childish self-indulgence. To be anti-anticommunist or anti-American in a variety of symbolic ways—through taking a number of specific political positions on particular issues—is not a form of idealism. I can do no better than to quote Max Weber: "the world is governed by demons and . . . he who lets himself in for politics, that is, for power and force as means, contracts with diabolic powers and for his action it is *not* true that good can only follow from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who fails to see this is, indeed, a political infant." One of the luxuries of living in a political democracy is that one can indeed behave like a political infant. I find it both tiresome and embarrassing to see colleagues and associates on the liberal left speaking as if they would like to attain a monopoly on this form of behavior.

Leon Wieseltier

Years ago Harold Rosenberg described what he called "the herd of independent minds." What we have now is the litter.

Morris Dickstein's statement is not an analysis of anything;

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it is, rather, an anthology of assumptions, some of them right, some of them wrong, all of them unargued. He is right, for example, to fear nuclear war, but he is also banal. He is for deterrence and against nuclear war fighting. Good. That much can indeed be learned from the *New York Review of Books*. But how exactly does Dickstein, who is in a state of great agitation about the likelihood of the apocalypse, want deterrence to be managed? Plainly he is against the MX. Also good. Is he, then, for the D-5? The Midgetman? Has he studied the Soviet version of nuclear strategy? What implications would he draw from it for American strategy? Is he sure that NATO does not need the Pershings? How would he address the conventional imbalance in Europe? Is he for the zero option, or zero-plus, or do the SS-20s not trouble him at all? About all these things, silence. He has dodged, in short, all the difficult questions, and while he appears to think much about our predicament, he seems dead to its details. But citations from George Kennan and McGeorge Bundy do not quite constitute a seriously considered position.

The job description of an intellectual includes the ability to make distinctions. In this respect Dickstein is delinquent, and in a way that moves you to despair about the condition of the intellectuals. It is true that there are "critics of the peace movement" who see a Soviet hand in all forms of present protest. But it is also true that there are critics of the peace movement who do not. There are those who criticize the peace movement, or most of it, with respect. They accuse it not of being "anti-American" but of being wrong—and not even wrong in everything. But there is no room for such criticism in Dickstein's scheme of things. The scheme has a familiar look. If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. If you are against the freeze, you are for "holy war." If you are anticommunist, you are a Somocista. Dickstein is correct, but he hurts himself, to invoke the 1950s, when anti-Stalinists were indistinguishable for some on the left from pro-McCarthyites, when the independent criticism of Stalinist "well-meaning idealists," whatever its moral and philosophical legitimacy, was attacked as the work of the devil. (May I recomend to Dickstein a recent essay in the April 23 issue of *The Nation* that has a basis in reality—Andrew Kopkind's "The Return of Cold War Liberalism," which will introduce some cartographic complications into Dickstein's map of the intellec-

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tual world. The essay, he will be pleased to hear, will give the neoconservatives no comfort. Here they are, from sunrise to sunset shouting against the Soviets, and Irving Howe gets the blame!)

Dickstein's descriptions of the past, however, are more troubling than his prescriptions for the future. It is one thing to stay out of politics, whose particulars are usually sordid; maybe a good mind should. It is another thing to stay out of history. Let us settle something, however, about the comparison between Stalin and Hitler. It was Hitler, and not Stalin, who perpetrated the Final Solution; I am glad to be reminded of this, as I am glad to be reminded of my Jewishness. But Stalin murdered more people than Hitler. This is a fact, and it can't be helped. It is also a fact that Hitler murdered more *Jews* than Stalin, and for that I will hate him in a way I hope never to hate anything else. But it is not "a numbers game" (is Jonathan Schell's "republic of insects and grass" also "a number game"?) to acknowledge the full dimensions of the destiny that befell non-Jews at Stalin's hands. It is not exactly courageous either. It is merely honest. As is, therefore, the deep hatred of Stalinism, and the irascible impatience with its apologists. ("...Apologists for tyranny, and no more," Dickstein calls them.)

Dickstein worries that the hatred of the Soviet Union will cloud the judgment of the American government in an age of nuclear weapons; I worry about that too. It is a proper worry, though President Reagan's record on Russia should allay it somewhat; the right has more reason to complain about our Soviet policy than the left. Dickstein believes that Stalinism is "simply irrelevant" to the formulation of American nuclear strategy; he must know, since he has read my essay on strategy, that I believe this too, though I have an aversion to his rather characteristic "simply." (Some of Dickstein's strictures on my writing suggest that he is a bad reader, which is not what we would expect, to borrow a phrase, from a student of literature.) Still, the nature of the Soviet system does have consequences—not for our military strategy, but for our foreign policy. Here another important difference between Hitler and Stalin must be cited, and it is not a difference that will be congenial to Dickstein. The relevant history since the Second World War has been this: Hitler's regime was destroyed, but Stalin's regime was modified. It persists,

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though in a much less unpleasant form. For this reason Dickstein's antifascist platitudes, which are plenty in some parts of the left, are a bit beside the point. Fascism does not deserve the support of a democracy, except in an emergency, and the United States should add no strength to fascist governments, as the present administration is wont to do; but it is disingenuous and a little romantic to pretend that fascism is any longer the greatest danger.

Dickstein and I share a lot, I suspect, "self-righteousness," for one, a rejection of Reaganism, for another. But Dickstein must understand that not everything that Ronald Reagan says is wrong and not everything that the peace movement says is right. Maybe thinkers do not belong in movements. They certainly must not surrender to what Adorno called "the ticket mentality," which mentality is responsible for the loss of a considerable amount of credibility by the left in recent decades. The terms of the debate are not quite as rigid as Dickstein (and the people he hates most) would have it. The argument against the strategic doctrine of the present Pentagon does not require the argument for the fellow travelers of the 1950s. And the argument for the strategic doctrine of the present Pentagon does not require the argument for the blacklist. The former characterizes the radicals, and the latter characterizes conservatives. But arguing in packages is just the death of argument. This is what writers for this magazine grasped in its early years. For that reason they were a thorn in the side of the left and a thorn in the side of the right. We should all remain thorns. Dickstein wants a rose.

Dennis Wrong

In their remarks on both the United States and the Soviet Union, Brooks and Dickstein often confuse the two separate dualisms of left-right and domestic-foreign. Since its early years, *Partisan Review* has always been anticommunist, rejecting the Soviet and all other communist regimes as repulsive tyrannies, differing only in degree, that negate the democratic and libertarian values cherished by its editors and contributors. This position, however, carries in and of itself no necessary implications for foreign policy. The editors of *Partisan Review*

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indeed, in common with most left liberals, supported the alliance of the Western democracies with the Soviet Union during the Second World War when Hitler's Germany was clearly the main threat to freedom and to the independence of the nations of Europe.

After the war, the Soviet Union ruled by Stalin absorbed half of Europe, and anti-Stalinists on the left, including those associated with *Partisan Review* supported American and Western resistance to the threatened further expansion of Soviet power. *This* stand involved taking a position on foreign policy which was not entailed by the rejection of communism *per se*. (William O'Neill's *A Better World* accurately describes this political-ideological history—Dickstein's comment on O'Neill is so blatantly prejudiced as to raise doubts whether he has ever read the book.) Russian power, not communist ideology nor even the totalitarian nature of Soviet society, became the problem the United States and Western Europe have had to face up to since 1945. Is it "theological" to insist on the reality of Soviet power and to doubt that its aims have been benign? It is not clear that Brooks and Dickstein would answer this question affirmatively as opposed merely to objecting to the crude rhetoric about "evil empires," echoing older stereotypes of "godless communism," that Reagan indulges in from time to time. The injection of religious emotions into our foreign policy certainly might impart to it a character of militant aggressiveness that was absent from the original containment policy. Such attitudes were prevalent in the 1950s so often recalled by Reagan's rhetoric, a time when the United States was much stronger than the Soviet Union. Yet despite demands for a rollback of Soviet power in Eastern Europe and the restoration of Chiang in China, our actual policies remained more cautious and defensive under Eisenhower and Dulles than in the later Kennedy-Johnson years.

Dickstein argues that political life is haunted by "the specter of Stalinism and anti-Stalinism." I agree that "the ghost of Stalin is simply irrelevant to strategic issues today," but is the reality of Soviet power irrelevant to such issues? It was under Khrushchev that the Soviet Union suppressed the Hungarian Revolution, threatened Europe with a rain of nuclear missiles unless it got its way over Berlin, and placed nuclear missiles in Cuba. It was under Brezhnev that a Czechoslovakian liberal

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communist regime and the Polish workers' movement were suppressed, Afghanistan was invaded, the greatest arms build-up in Soviet peacetime history took place, and an unsuccessful plot to assassinate the Pope was undertaken. There are Soviet-watchers who think that Stalin, for all the horrors of his domestic rule, would never have been so bold and incautious as to order some of these actions (though he would undoubtedly not have permitted his Eastern European satellites to reach the point of insurrection). One can be thankful for the "liberalization" under Khrushchev and that it was not totally reversed under Brezhnev, without assuming that an aggressive, militarized foreign policy must coincide with peak intensities of domestic repression in the Soviet Union. Peter Brooks says he grew up accepting "the realities of Soviet totalitarianism and imperialism," but he then veers off into talking about alternative models for socialism without ever saying whether Soviet imperialism might not have some implications for American foreign policy simply because the Soviet Union is a great power, as imperialistic Iran or Libya (cf. the Sudan) or Indonesia (cf. East Timor) or Guatemala (cf. Belize) or North Vietnam (*sic*) are not.

Contending that for his generation "the 'socialism' of the Soviet Union was never any sort of viable political or intellectual option," Brooks neglects to mention that it has not been presented as an option even by American communists since at least Dimitrov's speech to the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in 1935. Dimitrov was the inventor—or first promulgator—of what later came to be described as "different roads to socialism" and, still later, "Eurocommunism." The Soviet Union has ever since been *primarily* an issue in foreign policy: in the Popular Front era, during the Stalin-Hitler pact, through the war, and for the continuing period of the cold war to the present day. (There have not been several cold wars, only one, an enduring condition marked by occasional cautious interludes of détente of which the early 70's was only the most recent.) The unavoidability of treating foreign policy towards the Soviet Union as a central issue in its own autonomous terms is, I take it, what Phillips meant to stress in his editorial to which Brooks is responding.

Brooks, however, thinks it was correct of the left to insist "upon linking domestic issues to international ones," but the

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"obvious examples" he cites are by no means obvious to me. The same administration that had most to do with involving us in Vietnam also achieved a second Reconstruction that appears to have permanently abolished racist institutions in the South. In what sense, then, did it "promote racism" at home? And what *is* the connection between American policies in Chile and El Salvador and "the fate of American cities"? I fail to see any, except that Peter Brooks disapproves of both. He confines his claims of a domestic-foreign policy connection to "over the past twenty years," presumably since Lyndon Johnson's assumption of the presidency. I too opposed the American military overinvolvement in Vietnam (though not *any* American involvement), but I *think this was a blunder in foreign policy, the worst but by no* means the first since 1945, and one that had little to do with the domestic goals of the Johnson administration, which, in fact, it undermined.

Support for the containment of Soviet power—"choosing the West," as Dwight Macdonald once put it—has never implied approval of everything that American governments have done since 1945 in declared opposition to the Soviet Union or other communist states, least of all where actions outside of Europe are concerned. These need to be evaluated independently in local terms. The cold war geopolitical justifications for them have sometimes been without substance, as may be the Reagan administration policies in Central America—even though it is far from self-evident that the guerrillas in El Salvador are democrats, freedom fighters, or agrarian reformers as so many who identify themselves with the left seem to think, displacing to a new locale past illusions that were shattered in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Iran, and Nicaragua. There is much bitter truth in Eden Pastora's recent remark that both the Sandinistas and the Reagan administration seem to be trying to confirm their worst fears about each other.

Confusion between international and internal politics is also evident in Dickstein's endorsement of Kennan's statement that Americans should end their "systematic condemnation of another great people and its government." I owe much of my understanding of foreign policy to George Kennan, for whom I worked as a research assistant many years ago, but Leon Wieseltier's dissent from this statement, to which Dickstein takes

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exception, is surely justified. Does Dickstein believe that morality should not only, like charity, begin at home but always stay there? Does he think it proper to protest conditions in El Salvador, or, perhaps, South Africa, because they are not great powers or historic nations but draw the line at the Soviet Union just because it is? Kennan is inclined to subordinate the domestic affairs of nations to world political considerations, the opposite bias to that of leftist ideologues who tend to treat foreign policy as a mere reflex of internal class struggle or right-left, liberal-conservative contestation. To his credit, Dickstein is inconsistent in acknowledging that *Partisan Review* has a duty to open its pages to East European dissidents and émigrés who scarcely shrink from "systematic condemnation" of Soviet communism.

I agree with Dickstein that "we need the counterpressures created by a peace movement, if only to remind us of the actual horrors to which our war games and scenarios might lead," having said this myself in almost the same words in the Spring issue of *Partisan Review*. Our fellow editor, Wieseltier, said it too last January in his long, sensible, and immensely informed discussion of nuclear policy in *The New Republic* to which Dickstein refers. So Brooks and Dickstein have no credible complaints about *Partisan Review* on this score. Dickstein's complaints ultimately concern issues of ancient history. I think he is right that William Barrett's 1946 *Partisan Review* editorial reprinted in his *The Truants* bears little relation to the present political situation in this country, but neither do the books by Hellman, Gornick, and Navasky, which are preoccupied with the same old controversies though taking the opposite side. Dickstein's attitude towards the anti-Stalinist liberals of several decades ago who reviewed or reacted to these books seems to be *"cette animal est trés méchant, quand on l'attaque il se defend."* For all of the books he mentions were directly aimed, naming names of individuals and journals, at the people who responded to them: Diana Trilling, Nathan Glazer, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., James Wechsler, William Phillips, former communists criticized by Gornick for refusing to take a "romantic" view of their political pasts, and the anti-Stalinist left in general.

As O'Neill documents, the anti-Stalinist left made no contribution to McCarthyism, although some individual members were slow or insufficiently vigorous in actively opposing it, as I

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myself argued at the time. McCarthyism was essentially the last stand of prewar isolationists on the right trying to exploit a new world situation. It appears to have been a self-immunizing disease, for efforts to revive it—by the Birchers, Agnew, Senator Helms, and others—have had little success.

It is important, as Brooks and Dickstein maintain, to criticize particular Reagan administration military proposals and pronouncements on foreign policy, "sheer bluster" though they may be, as Dickstein recognizes. But this job is hardly being neglected by members of Congress, including some of Reagan's own party, leading newspapers and other media, and people like Kennan, Bundy, MacNamara and Kissinger, who cannot be regarded as spokesmen for the left, which is indeed why Brooks and Dickstein cite them so freely. The tone of Brooks's and Dickstein's anxieties over a "new cold war mentality" would have seemed more appropriate a couple of years ago when Reagan first assumed office.

But it is also important that left liberals recognize the reality of Soviet power and the need for a realistic foreign policy to cope with it. I share the concern expressed by Jeffrey Herf in the Spring issue of *Partisan Review* that the European left (outside of France) is increasingly gravitating towards a self-deluding neutralist position on the conflict between the Soviet Union and the NATO powers. Such a position as well as its weaker reverberations on this side of the Atlantic, is something we should also oppose.

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BOOKS

THE WORM IN THE APPLE

FROM LOCKE TO SAUSSURE: ESSAYS ON THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY. By Hans Aarsleff. University of Minnesota Press. $29.50.

On the evidence provided by this book, it is arguable that Hans Aarsleff knows more about the history of language theory between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than anyone else is likely even to wish to know. His presentation of the principal figures and issues in this history, which extends from Locke to Saussure, is rich in both factual details and nuanced arguments. Consisting for the most part of articles written over a period of twenty years, the individual pieces are addressed to the interests of specialists, and they raise a number of issues which only specialists will be competent to address. For example: Did John Locke really lay the groundwork for a genuine science of language in his alleged perception of language as a specifically "social institution"? Was the Lockean view of language the principal basis for the more general theory of language of the eighteenth century, aspects of which were shared by thinkers as diverse as Leibniz, Turgot, Condillac, Herder, Goethe, Humboldt, the French *idéologues*, and even Wordsworth? Was Condillac less the sensationalist he is often considered to be, than the generalizer of the Lockean view of language and the principal architect of the second stage in the transformation of language study into a science? Was there a decline in the scientific study of language during the first half of the nineteenth century—the period conventionally thought of as inaugurating the scientific phase of this field, as evidenced by the rise during that time of philology? Was philology itself less a contribution to a possible science of language, than a subversion of the whole scientific enterprise? And if so, was this subversive activity a result, in some way, of the political reaction that followed the French Revolution? Was this reaction, in turn, also a cause of the distorted notion and rejection of the Enlightenment which marked the romantic period and

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extended far into the Victorian era? Did some hitherto-regarded lesser lights in European intellectual history, such as Taine, Madvig, Jesperson, Bréal, perceive the fraud of philology and, in their criticism of it, lay the groundwork for the transformation of language study into the science finally established by Saussure in the twentieth century? Does Saussure really represent the foundation of a genuine science of language, i.e., linguistics, which must be seen less as a continuation of philology than as its scientific antithesis? Finally, was there a consistent and coherent tradition of scientific study of language, extending from Locke to Saussure, which should be regarded as the keystone of European intellectual history in general? And, as a corollary of this, was philology basically an ideology, the purpose or at least the effect of which was to impede the transformation of language study into a science and, at the same time, to serve the causes of reaction, obscurantism, idealist metaphysics, and even racism in the very bosom of the developing human sciences of the late nineteenth century?

These are all issues that scholars interested in the history of language theory are already debating and will no doubt continue to debate, now that Aarsleff has stated his views in the form of a book which ties together his various special studies within the framework of a general narrative account of the rise of the science of linguistics, Saussure style. These issues, however, bear upon larger ones which even the nonspecialist will find of interest, such as: how sciences are formed and established, the ideologies of the human and social sciences, the theory of humanistic and especially literary studies, and—of course—the general intellectual history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And not only because Aarsleff argues that, since language is the first and most basic of all social institutions, the study of theories about language should stand at the center of any general theory of society, culture, and human nature; but also because, given this thesis, his account of the *real* history of language theory implies a revision every bit as radical as anything to be found in Foucault, of the way we have conventionally conceptualized the general history of ideas.

Aarsleff might be seen as the liberal counterpart of the nihilistic Foucault. He still believes in progress in the human sciences. He finds continuities where Foucault perceives only ruptures and gaps. Moreover, he believes that science is not merely

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one discourse among many but rather the carrier of the only enlightenment we can realistically hope for. He speaks continually of the "coherence and consistency" of the tradition of which he is the historian. And he has in fact constructed a genealogy—in the older, pre-Foucaultian sense of the term—for the modern science of linguistics which, by his lights, Saussure founded on the basis of work that preceded him by two centuries.

There is, however, a more general argument interwoven into Aarsleff's richly textured study of the high points of the story he would offer as an alternative to the conventional account of the rise of a science of language. This argument appears in the guise of a sustained criticism of "essentialism," a term which in his usage seems to cover such diverse cultural phenomena as mysticism, organicism, vitalism, naturalism, radical skepticism, and metaphysical idealism. It is his twofold argument, consisting of a defense of science, on the one side, and the denigration of essentialism, on the other, that gives to Aarsleff's book its relevance to many of the conflicts current in recent debates over the nature of the human sciences.

Essentialism—I surmise from Aarsleff's representations of its many forms—is the belief that things have essences, that these essences can be apprehended by means of perception, intuition, or revelation, that these essences can be represented adequately in words, and that such words can convey the essences of the ideas we have about things. The centrality of language theory to any scientific conception of truth derives from the fact that the manner in which we apprehend the relations among ideas, words, and things will determine the nature of our notion of the *kind* of knowledge we can have of reality. If, as the Adamicist theory of language has it, there was once (or ever could be) anything like a body of words perfectly adequate to the representation of the things they designate, then in principle the ideas we have about things could be made perfectly adequate to our perception of these things. Since, however, in Aarsleff's view, perceptions can be worked up into ideas only by way of verbal representations of things, the way in which one views words (or language or signs in general) will be crucial to any notion we might form of the epistemic status of ideas themselves. And since, also in his view, words (and language and signs in general) are, in their culturally significant aspects at least, social entities, products of purely social conventions, and

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hence ultimately arbitrary in their meanings, it follows for him that the whole project of either purifying language or discovering a universal grammar must be considered nugatory, not to say sinister in its motivations. The indictment of this project extends from mystical believers in a purely Adamic or divinely revealed language, to the Port Royalists of the seventeenth century, down to certain positivists in our own epoch—and includes by implication Russell and Chomsky especially, not to mention Heidegger, the structuralists (with their absurd notion that "language speaks man"), and the poststructuralists (with their frivolous notion of language as "freeplay").

I hasten to stress that this indictment is not drawn up openly by Aarsleff in this book, except for the single instance of an essay which subjects Chomsky's account of "Cartesian linguistics" to such a devastating critique that nothing is left of it in the end. For the most part, not even the historical studies by contemporary theorists of language in the essentialist tradition are cited. Aarsleff shows his contempt by simply ignoring them. They are at best treated as he treats Hegel, whom he mentions but once—in a parenthetical phrase. So Aarsleff's book is not only a history, a putatively *true* account of the *real* story of the establishment of a science of language, but also—like all histories—a story with a moral. It is a defense of science, and a warning of what happens when science becomes corrupted by essentialist impulses. No doubt about it, whatever the merits of this work *as history* (and they are many), it is also a book of our current cultural moment, a shot aimed at all those theorists of the human sciences who base their ideas on a partial or distorted understanding of the nature of language or on a misuse of the true science of language founded by Locke.

In its broadest implications, then, Aarsleff's book can be considered a contribution to the current discussions of the nature of language; the relations between language, thought, and culture; the possibility of a science of society; and the problem of the superstructure which wracks contemporary Marxist theory. One can predict that the nature of its reception will be determined in large part by the positions that prospective reviewers hold on these issues. This should not, however, obscure the fact that Aarsleff has advanced important—and massively documented—arguments for a revision of the intellectual history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His onslaught on the authority of philology and

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its putative etymological method will be disturbing to humanists who continue, one way or another, to derive sustenance from philologists' achievements in mapping the history of language and literature alike. If Aarsleff is right in what he has to say about philology, he may have identified the worm in the apple of contemporary humanistic studies. And that alone would be more than enough to warrant giving his ideas serious consideration.

HAYDEN WHITE

LA GRANDE POÉSIE DE LA VIE

OH WHAT A PARADISE IT SEEMS. By John Cheever. Alfred A. Knopf. $10.00.

The title says it all: *Oh What a Paradise It Seems* is a work whose wistful sense of beauty colors its tone, symbols, and central character. Moreover, John Cheever's recent death endows the book with the added poignancy of a "Last Thing." Draped with the solemn mantle of finality, *Oh What a Paradise* manages to hold up under the strain; the book is true to the integrity of its mood, and this is an achievement, since in certain ways the novella tends to split in two.

At its center, structurally and thematically, is the pollution of a small pond in a "little village by the waterfall where the mill, so many years ago, used to produce gingham." In the foreground is an assortment of characters and incidents all somehow connected with the pond's fate but presented as crudely as cartoons. *Women Brawl in Supermarket; Baby Misplaced on Highway Returned to Parents; Household Head Shoots Family Dog; Environmentalist Hit and Run Victim After Pollution Hearing; Poisoned Family in Satisfactory Condition; Polluted Pond Reclaimed*—these headlines (all might be in the book; one is) show the tale's blend of the timely—notably the pollution theme—and timeless. The timeless battle of good and evil is presented in terms that suggest late Shakespearean romance, as reunion and restoration follow fearful loss. And not only Shakespeare glimmers as a source. "When he

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found a clean, happy baby waving its hands and feet he exclaimed: 'You must be Moses, you must be King of the Jews.' "

If the foreground of *Oh What a Paradise* consists of headlines, then the background (what lies behind the polluted pond) is not a series of characters or events but the sound of a voice. This speaker is notable for elegant language, precise imagery, relaxed pace, but most striking in elusiveness: just who, we wonder again and again, is speaking or thinking? Lemuel Sears, the aging and nostalgic protagonist, merges with the anonymous narrative "I" in unobtrusive ways. We no sooner meet Sears, for example, than we are treated to a little catalogue of vanished things:

> He was old enough to remember when the horizons of his country were dominated by the beautiful and lachrymose wine-glass elm tree and when most of the bathtubs one stepped into had lions' claws. He was old enough to remember the promise of dirigible travel, and he would never forget marching into one of the capital cities of the Holy Roman Empire...

The implication is that the narrator too recalls and misses these details. Later, Sears goes skating on the not yet polluted Beasley's Pond. This time the accompanying memories are presented as if they arise specifically in Sears's mind. He thinks of Brueghel skating scenes, then of an aural association: "The voices [of the skaters]...had an extraordinary lightness that reminded him of voices from a Mediterranean beach before, through the savagery of pollution, that coast was lost to us." The unvoiced connection between the polluted Mediterranean and the polluted pond is typical of the very unheadlinelike indirection of the background voice(s) throughout.

Sometimes the constant invocation of history and memory, the public and personal past, becomes annoyingly predictable and digressive, as in the excursus on fried food or the everlasting comparison of any one woman to all the others ("she was the kind of woman who always..."). Still, the point is made: it is through memory that pain and pleasure are most keenly felt and truly expressed. Sears, and certainly the narrator, is less a person of action than an assemblage of recollections.

Thus one of the offshoots of the pollution motif in *Oh What a Paradise* is conservation—not only of a pond but of imagin-

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ation through its relation to memory and experience. That relation can be sinuous, as trope glides into memory or vice versa. For example, Sears is distressed when a lover leaves him, and his feeling of bleakness is conveyed through a metaphoric travelogue. "Now there are, it seemed to Sears, some Balkans of the spirit, where the villages are lit by fire and the bears weigh upwards of seven hundred pounds, and to which he now found himself quite helplessly being transported..." Wonderfully drab details follow. But when, a few pages on, we read a flashback of Sears's encounter with a blind Balkan prophetess, this "Balkan of the spirit" retroactively becomes more than an extended figure of speech. Sears's sojourn there, if figurative, is no less "real" than his visit to blind Gallia, his abortive fishing trip with Eduardo the elevator man, or his meeting Renée in line at the bank.

At moments, Sears vanishes altogether. It may be with some discomfort that we come upon the fantasy of lying near a stream gunning for intruders, abruptly introduced at the beginning of a chapter. "What I can see of the sky is blue. The smell of mint is very strong and I hear the music of water." Just who is this "I"? But by the end of this watery tale, the separate streams of Sears, the narrator, and perhaps of the late John Cheever too, have merged with a grace that transcends narrative logic.

> What moved him was a sense of those worlds around us, our knowledge however imperfect of their nature, our sense of their possessing some grain of our past and of our lives to come. It was that most powerful sense of our being alive on the planet...of how singular, in the vastness of creation, is the richness of our opportunity. The sense of that hour was of an exquisite privilege, the great benefice of living here and renewing ourselves with love. What a paradise it seemed!

This composite voice—a little chorus—is the truest voice of *Oh What a Paradise It Seems*. The tone is awe at the beauty of a pond, a life, a world precariously salvaged from destruction. The theme is germane—and a fitting way to end a work that ends a life's work. Still, this book remains a curious, not altogether comfortable blend of foreground headline and background hymn. It may well be too Wordsworthian for fans of the Wapshots, and too suburban for lovers of nature lyric.

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Some of the discomfort disappears if we regard the work as essentially a poem in prose. The narrator would have us curl up for a cosy tale: "This is a story to be read in bed in an old house on a rainy night." Don't believe it. A much better comment on the spirit of the work is what the Balkan soothsayer says to Sears in her incomprehensible language. "'I have no idea what she means,' said the interpreter, 'but what she said was "*La grande poésie de la vie*".'" The poetry of earth is Cheever's true subject in this book; his genre is the poetry of praise.

RACHEL HADAS

THE INNER GENTLEMAN

THE GENTLEMEN IN TROLLOPE: INDIVIDUALITY AND MORAL CONDUCT. By Shirley Robin Letwin. Harvard University Press. $20.00.

It is unfortunate that the title of Shirley Letwin's book, though accurate enough in a narrowly descriptive sense, is likely to give many potential readers the wrong idea of what to expect. Ms. Letwin is certainly not unaware of the problem. The subject of the English gentleman, as she points out with wit and economy in the early section of her book, conjures up images of snobbery and class privilege, characters who are alternately stuffy and ridiculous. In fact, it is Ms. Letwin's purpose to challenge most of the commonplace sociological and economic definitions of the term in favor of one that is essentially moral. According to her argument, it is not wealth, property, genetic purity, accent, clothing, or manner that makes the English gentleman, but a concept of the self and the moral conduct that is its consequence.

"The morality that is the subject of this book denies that human beings are divided between reason and passion." Thus stated, Ms. Letwin's thesis appears deceptively simple. Her exposition and elaboration of it, however, is subtle and intriguing. It is her contention that continental views of the gentleman derive from classical conceptions of an ideal universe that man, because of his divided nature, can imagine but not truly conform to in

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his individual life. Society and the body politic depend on manners and conventions, but these will never fully express the inner man. Thus civilization and the cultured individuals who are its flower are, at best, the result of an uneasy and constantly fluctuating compromise or, at worst, of a hypocritical masquerade in which the baser passions are publicly denied while privately given full license. Though Ms. Letwin does not use the example, one thinks of the court of Louis XIV which, of course, had its English admirers and imitators, but which came to stand for a distastefully "foreign" blend of ostentation and brutality.

Ms. Letwin does not claim to be writing social history and therefore she does not attempt to trace the development of the gentleman either in England or on the continent. Her method is to use literature as a means to define a type. While noting its partial origins in philosophy and particularly in Christianity and making persuasive suggestions about how and why it came into its own, she is primarily interested in defining and exploring the phenomenon in the fiction of Victorian England. She sets out to understand the peculiarly English "ability to tolerate without strain a combination of qualities that were elsewhere considered incompatible." Key to Ms. Letwin's search is the distinctive English attitude toward reason, an attribute that is neither transcendent nor absolute, but practical and human.

> The only thing given to a human being is the power to choose what to see, feel, think, and do, which constitutes his rationality and his humanity. . . . Rationality . . . is not a link to something outside the human world. . . . Though called reason, it must not be confused with a cosmic principle of "Reason." It is a purely human property which enables men to make of themselves what they will.

The stress on the individual will and the challenge to human beings to shape themselves and their environment lead to a special emphasis on education and a view of learning that continue to distinguish British and American schools from those of continental Europe.

> Learning carries no threat to individuality. . . . The pupil has the character of an apprentice, not a disciple, and his is only

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> temporarily so until he acquires the skills, not the style, of the master. For learning the arts of civilization does not consist in copying patterns but in mastering a language of one sort or another, and knowing a language does not dictate what should be said.

Passages of this kind—lucid, elegant, balanced, concise—abound in this book and lift it well beyond the apparent limits of its subject. It becomes clear that the phenomenon being described, though harder and harder to find in society and fiction, has had powerful and widespread influence on American and British values. Of the four cardinal virtues attributed by Ms. Letwin to the gentleman, two—courage and honesty—are predictable. But even in discussing these, the author brings a refreshing and wise judgment to bear. A gentleman's courage consists in "hearing objections that may prove him wrong," enduring criticism "once he has taken his decision," while avoiding the arrogance or obstinacy of assuming absolute authority. Honesty is not sincerity or authenticity, but a "clarity about what he does and does not know and about what kind of knowledge is appropriate to answering the questions in hand."

The two gentlemanly virtues that will seem less obvious to American readers are discrimination and diffidence. For "discrimination" one might well supply words like judgment or perspicacity, for this virtue, as Ms. Letwin defines it, is a moral sensitivity to context, to the rich and often complicated interrelatedness of things which makes behaving according to a simple code impossible for a rational being. She does not mean moral relativity, but rather an ability to apply general principles to particular cases with charity and intelligence. This notion of morality, she argues, is one of the reasons that the English genius has found the novel a particularly congenial vehicle. The novel of manners, for the English, is not mere entertainment. At its best, it strikes at the core of a conception of moral conduct that requires a fine alertness to tone, gesture, moment, in short, to the human situation in its ever-changing shapes and shades.

The gentleman is diffident, not as is usually supposed, simply out of unwillingness to give offense, and certainly not because he thinks he is inferior, but because he has "a pervasive awareness of the limitations of all human reason." He is philo-

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sophically and morally repelled by those who impose on others. If one thinks of the villains in Austen, the Brontës, Thackeray, Eliot, James, and, of course, Trollope, the virtue and its opposite vice assume familiar shapes.

At least two thirds of Ms. Letwin's book is devoted to an examination of characters in Trollope's fiction against the background of her discussion of the gentleman and moral conduct. Like the earlier section of the book, these discussions are intelligent, pointed and always illuminating. By starting out with a brilliant analysis of the character of Madame Max Goesler, daughter of a German Jewish attorney, Ms. Letwin makes unforgettably clear that the "English gentleman," as she defined the term, need not be English, gentle, gentile, or male. The measure, as she has been arguing all along, is of an attitude revealed in a process. The author's concern, like that of Trollope and most of the greatest of English novelists, is how people behave and what motivates them.

> What defines a gentleman is a way of being in any circumstances. Even alone on his island, Robinson Crusoe is a gentleman . . . in his unfailing respect for the humanity of himself and all men; his ability to appreciate the treasures of civilization; his efforts to refashion them for new circumstances; his readiness to build new skills on old; his learning to recognize and repent for his sins; his determination to give his days an orderly shape, to reconcile himself to his misfortune and to endow his life with what grace and contentment he can manage.

If there is anything to be regretted about this neatly constructed, beautifully written and stimulating book, it is that, in its provocative opening chapters, it raises questions of broad concern and then proceeds to tie them, albeit persuasively, to only one author. Lodged in this very good book on Trollope is a brilliant essay on the gentleman that could well stand alone or within a literary context of much wider range.

ROBERT KIELY

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LITERARY DETECTIVE

STUFF OF SLEEP AND DREAMS: EXPERIMENTS IN LITERARY PSYCHOLOGY. By Leon Edel. Harper and Row. $20.00.

In the course of a recent newspaper interview, Leon Edel stated that he intends to write his memoirs. To judge from this collection of essays, most of them previously published, the process of memorialization has already started. Edel weaves personal memory together with biographical study, psychological speculation, and literary judgment. We encounter the young lion on a journey to Vienna where he meets Alfred Adler and becomes interested in depth psychology. We see him stalking the literary community in Paris, eyeing James Joyce from afar. We meet him in the occupying army in Germany discovering the grubby portrait of the artist as a human being. These three incidents—the encounter with depth psychology, the youthful idealization of Joyce, the discovery of Joyce's less than admirable character—are significant. His biographical endeavors will henceforth remove artists from pedestals of their own or others' making.

Thus, he reveals for us a Thoreau other than the lover of solitude and of self-reliance in nature. While at Walden Pond, where he retreated from the criticism of the townspeople of Concord who held him in low regard for accidentally setting a forest fire, Thoreau returns to his mother's home each day. Thus too, Kipling, the manly adventurer, has an intense, latent homosexual friendship with Charles Wolcott Balestier, the publisher's representative, while Auden exposes the roots of his homosexuality in the very material in which he expresses his dislike of the type of biographical inquiry Edel practices. There is more here as well: excursions into the depressions of T.S. Eliot, Willa Cather, and Virginia Woolf; a chapter on the literary production of Tolstoy, James, and Yeats in their old age; and an interesting speculation on how the character of Henry James, Sr. affected his three children.

Edel has a fine sense for the contradictory detail, and thus for the framing of research as puzzle. Why does Hugh Walpole refer to "The Turning (rather than the Turn) of the Screw" in his dedication of *The Killer and the Slain* to Henry James? Why does Rex

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Stout choose to name his detective Nero Wolfe? What is the significance of *The Professor's House* to Willa Cather, since that curious novel is informed by a deep depression not entirely accounted for in the fiction itself? Edel is at his best when on the trail to an answer. One senses the enormously thorough though lightly worn scholarship, the bold marshaling of factual detail. Above all, one feels his pleasure in the chase after psychological truth.

The hunt ends when the literary text is stripped away to reveal "what literature expresses of the human being who creates it." That is, Edel's procedure involves the concept of the text hiding psychic reality like a mask. Moreover, the unmasking of the work in order to arrive at the personal reality of the author is not entirely without conflict. When Edel defends "literary psychology," his prose assumes a tone either self-justificatory or, occasionally, messianic. Certainly, there is a substantial body of critical opinion opposed to exposing the clay feet of any artist, and much of this opposition is directed toward any scrutiny of literature informed by psychoanalytic insight. Yet why, one wonders, is Edel trying to convince the unconvinceable? While his essays themselves, sound in scholarship and commonsensical in psychology, are his best argument against narrow-mindedness, his description of what he is doing is questionable.

Were he to wonder what is the unconscious meaning of this act of unmasking that it requires such defensive justification and inaccurate description, Edel would turn to biographical evidence, memoirs, letters, and the entire canon of a subject's work for evidence of his subject's "unconscious myth." Along the way, he would pose other questions about the choice of various authors for study, the meaning of the long immersion in James out of which the admirable biography emerged, and the meaning of this sort of inquiry itself.

Such questions lead us away from a discussion of literary psychology to its seductively gratifying practice where we, too, become detectives. Edel surely avoids theoretical explanations because he knows how pleasurably involved his audience becomes in the detective's pursuit of mystery. Indeed, readable, lucid, with his knack of asking the intriguing question, Edel appeals to the whodunit reader in each of us.

Nevertheless, Edel makes some claims for his literary psychology that ought to be examined. He distinguishes, rather un-

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convincingly, literary psychology, applied psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a therapy, applied psychoanalysis is a contradiction in terms, and literary psychology should be practiced by literary critics and biographers. Literary psychology will solve the mysteries of the creative work that baffled Freud: "Freud's remark that 'before the problems of the creative artist, analysis must, alas, lay down its arms,' may be challenged by literary psychology: before those problems I would say *literary* psychology . . . picks up its arms." It is hard to see how literary psychology has the tools to accomplish this feat. It is, according to Edel, the study of the metamorphosis of unconscious material into conscious image and symbol. As such, he conceives the literary work to be analogous to the dream, the daydream, or the symptom. Since psychoanalysis has long concerned itself with unraveling symptoms, daydreams, and dreams, there is nothing alien to psychoanalysis in Edel's enterprise, providing that suitable evidence may be found to replace free association. Freud lay down his arms over aesthetic questions beyond the realm of psychological explanation, not because his science was incapable of interpreting dreams or unraveling symptoms, but because a work of literature, though like a dream or a symptom in some respects, is also *more* than either. Edel never really addresses this difference: his proclivity for looking at the work as a mask of psychic reality prevents his doing so.

There are other applications of psychoanalysis to literature that take us further toward fathoming the power and mystery of the literary work. These, to which Edel never refers, stay with the creative product far longer, listening to its form, tone, and contradictions, its metaphorical and rhetorical patterns, its less accessible content. This approach utilizes sophisticated, literary, critical tools in conjunction with psychoanalytic perspective and remains with fantasy content rather than moving to historical reality. To be sure, any uncovering of latent content refers back to the unconscious of the author of the work; however, an emphasis on latent fantasy content that allows us to perceive a text from a new perspective is not the same as an emphasis on the psychic reality of the author.

It is a pity that Edel's claims for literary psychology far outstrip what he accomplishes, because he accomplishes a good deal. What he gives us is a practical approach to literary biography

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that is not content with surface claims or appearances. Such an approach is properly concerned with the rudiments of psychological motivation for the creative act and with the effect of character formation on the creative product. Edel's conclusions remain commonsensical and do not overstep these limitations.

But practicing clinicians, who are more acutely aware of methodological difficulties and more steeped in the subtleties of the mind and in the specificity of unconscious fantasy, can proceed further. Works by Selma Fraiberg on Kafka and by Francis Baudry on Flaubert, to name just two examples, belie the heavy-handed pathographies of earlier analysts who attempted to reduce all literary efforts to their genetic roots in the infantile neurosis of the artist. (Edel is in part reacting to these clumsy efforts in suggesting a new discipline.) The works by Fraiberg and Baudry are noteworthy in their respect for what clinical conclusions the data allow them to draw and for their awareness of psychological complexity and pitfall. And the long years of clinical practice permit subtle distinctions that a critic cannot hope to make. For instance, the assumption that the creative act is an attempt to resolve intrapsychic conflict seems to underlie several of Edel's essays. We need to be aware, however, that the creative act may also function in other ways. It may represent an id-striving, or a defense against one, for instance. And the intrapsychic function may shift within the same character, as the author's relationship to a particular character may shift within a work, a chapter, or a paragraph. The same character can represent different aspects of the author at different moments, with the shifts in identification occurring in the context of changes in action or in narrative perspective.

There is ironically something uesful in Edel's choice of the term "literary psychology": its *de facto* recognition of the limitation of what Edel actually does. Although literary psychology is not psychoanalysis or applied psychoanalysis, it is a practical, useful offshoot that opens up the unconscious processes of the writer for literary study. However reluctant the literary community might be to accept this uncovered depth, Edel performs an invaluable service by insisting on its existence and persisting in its demonstration.

GAIL S. REED

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THE OLDEST STORIES

THE GREAT CODE: THE BIBLE AND LITERATURE. By Northrop Frye. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $14.95.
THE STORY OF THE STORIES: THE CHOSEN PEOPLE AND ITS GOD. By Dan Jacobson. Harper & Row. $11.95.
THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE. By Robert Alter. Basic Books. $13.95.

After a long period of neglect by humanistic scholars—except for a few who advanced unsophisticated points of view—it looks as if the Bible as literature is receiving the serious attention it deserves. Literary scholars in particular are examining the Scriptures from a secular vantage point.

It should be recognized at the outset that some religious scholars, not to speak of strongly committed religious people, object to a literary reading of the Bible; but in a nonreligious world, I think there is every justification for studying the Bible as literature and, as Alter argues, a literary approach can help to explain quite a number of difficulties earlier scholars, using historical approaches of various sorts, have inadequately explained.

What we have here are three works of major importance: Northrop Frye's ahistorical study based largely on myth, in the archetypical sense of the word; Jacobson's attempt to show that one basic myth provides the central theme for the whole biblical story; and Alter's literary analysis of Old Testament narrative. Not only are all three important in a general sense; they are also original and incisive pieces of literary criticism. Except for Alter's book, which makes some use of others' work, they are *sui generis*. All should be read by those interested in the Bible as well as by those who believe in it, by those who do not believe, and by those who do and do not believe in it at the same time.

In *The Great Code,* Frye realizes an old desire, a desire predating his famous *Anatomy of Criticism*: to study the Bible as literature. Nor has this one volume satisfied that desire; a second volume is already under way. Frye underlines his literary approach: "The present book is not a work of Biblical scholarship, expresses only my own personal encounter with the Bible." Though recognizing that the Bible was constructed over at least a

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thousand years, Frye assumes it is, or should be considered, a unity because it "has traditionally been read as a unity and has influenced the western imagination as a unity." In spite of its differences of authorship, genre, and date of composition, it is "a unified structure of narrative and imagery." He also tells us that he is assuming that the Bible is a Christian Bible even though he knows the Jewish and Islamic conceptions of it differ from his own. In short, Frye dehistoricizes the Bible, using a method that resembles the rabbinical approach which assumes that every difficulty in the text can be explained by reference to other parts of the text. In a word, he would have us believe that the Bible explains itself.

Frye's mode of exegesis and interpretation of the Bible is, however, significantly different from the rabbinical. Although he treats the text as a unit, he seeks its unity in myth and language. His interpretation is built on both traditional and novel typology and the discovery of archetypical patterns; the first identifying events in the Old Testament that foreshadow those in the New; the second relating events and stories to one of the various world-wide myths such as the descent, the struggle, the victory of the younger son over the older, etc. The sacrifice of Isaac, for example, is seen to foreshadow the crucifixion; and the creation and quest archetypes, to take two other examples, are repeatedly present. The Bible is a unity, *spiritually speaking*, beginning with Creation and ending with the Apocalypse. But the dissimilarities which Frye ignores cannot be dismissed. History and truth are also there. I don't think Frye would deny this but because of his premises he cannot include the historical dimensions in his analysis. For this reason, the treatment is not entirely satisfactory. It is unsatisfying to treat a work composed over a thousand years as one unless, like the rabbis, one takes the Bible as a divine gift organized in advance.

This should not put us off; in spite of its atemporal approach the book is rich in insight and learning. Not only do we learn a great deal from a deeply original and learned mind which is at work in this book, but we take pleasure in its style as well. It reads smoothly and makes its points forcefully. We find insights on every page.

With *The Story of the Stories* we move into a different world because Jacobson, unlike Frye, is concerned with a single

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myth. Jacobson assumes a covenantal myth which would hardly qualify as a myth even in Frye's wide-ranging repertoire. He presents a Jewish nonbeliever's analysis of how the Old Testament story was first put together. He argues that it was created by ancient Jews to justify or explain the ancient Israelites' conquest of Canaan and then, in fuller form, the punishments which overtook the Jews in biblical days. Actually, the book begins with the most notable of these punishments—the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the exile into Babylon (586 B.C.)—and then moves into earlier Hebrew history. The covenant notion, he believes, is the basis of the whole relationship between the people and God, and like the Hegelian slave and master relationship, the Jews are not only dependent on God, but God is also dependent on the Jews. This myth, with its demand on the Jews and on God, gave rise to an addendum: a final apocalyptic order with the coming of a Messiah from the House of David.

Jacobson has some doubts about his own myth and to me, at least, the most fascinating part of the book and theory is not his covenant theory—which echoes others—but rather the author's own doubt about the truth of his story. He is almost a believer *malgré lui-même*. The impact of this Old Testament myth on the world is hard to explain by any theory let alone a covenant theory. One gets the feeling that behind much of this intriguing and well-written little book is the impact of the twentieth-century history of the Jews on our author. He may also be thinking of his native South Africa.

Another way of looking at this book is to see that the myth behind the Jews is not the covenant myth but the fact that for most of mankind for several millenia, the Jews themselves are a mythic people. Every people has myths about themselves; a small number enter the myths of other countries, but very few, indeed, become almost world myths. The Jews belong to the last class for they are part of the myths of many European peoples, of groups in Asia and in North Africa. And their myth echoes the hatred of many. Of all the burdens the Jews have had to carry through their earthly existence, the worst is the gentile mythic one with all its variations.

Difficulties with Jacobson's theory abound. The impact of Jacobson's chosen myth on the world and even on the Jews is hard to explain. How could the Egyptian episode be made up?

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Who would accept it? I'm not claiming that there is not some embroidery here and there in the Biblical account, but there must have been some exodus from Egypt in order to get an acceptance of the exodus story by the Jews. Yet Jacobson seems to think that the history of the Jews, especially before the conquest of Canaan, was made out of whole cloth. Furthermore, why were the Jews so upset about the conquest of Canaan that they had to create a covenant myth to make it sound just? The Hebrews of the thirteenth or twelfth centuries B.C. must have been extraordinarily gentle and sensitive to do so, hardly the kind of warriors one would expect—warriors racked by doubts and sensitivities.

These two books reflect the revived apocalyptic spirit of our age. The creation of the atom bomb, as Professor Vann Woodward pointed out some thirty years ago, has changed the attitude of most of our population towards the long apocalyptic tradition found in the Bible, a tradition largely eclipsed in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. No longer can it be ignored. Both Frye and Jacobson take the apocalyptic tradition seriously, and although they consider it as myth rather than reality, they both give a high and important place to myth.

Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* is a more academic book than the other two, but, like them, an important contribution to biblical and literary studies. Its subject is the narrative technique of the story parts of the Old Testament. It is written by a man who has been interested in narrative for a long time. Although not a structuralist or poststructuralist theorist, Alter has here written the best introduction to the narrative technique of the Bible in English. It is, however, more than that; it is also a contribution to the interpretation of the narrative parts of the Bible and it helps to explain some of the cruces and difficulties of the Bible. Literary analysis has been little used by professional biblical scholars.

Although Alter states in his preface that the purpose of his literary analysis is to illustrate general principles and not to provide a commentary on particular passages, nonetheless he has provided us with a number of perceptive analyses of parts of the Bible.

These three books are all valuable in their different ways, but are alike in taking seriously their task and in bringing to it originality, style and a richness of perception. They presage, one hopes,

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a new and more exciting attitude towards the Bible as literature and, even more important, towards the meaning of its venerable stories, poems, proverbs, psalms, and wisdom literature. This approach is not dilettantish but serious and penetrating. It makes us see in new ways some of the true profundities of the Bible. In an areligious and irreligious world, they may help its members to see the Book of Books in a new light and may bring some enlightenment to believers and even nonbelievers.

MORTON W. BLOOMFIELD

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LETTERS

What is Left of the Left?

To the Editor:

William Phillips ("Comment," *Partisan Review*, 4, 1982) regrets that socialism in America is no longer a coherent international ideology but a media-influenced, disembodied reformism whose unthinking antinational perspective opposes American power in a manner that benefits the other antisocialist empire—the Soviet Union. All of this is to be regretted but Phillips offers no way out. Indeed, by requiring the American left to address itself to Soviet authoritarianism and imperialism he sharpens the dilemma. How the left in the United States could take such a position without being drowned by the larger cold war chorus is very difficult to imagine. Adding "and Afghanistan too" at the bottom of the posters will hardly solve the profound problem of working for the revolutionary transformation of modern society in a world whose state mechanisms (both right and left) tower over their civil societies. The request that the left within each state tailor its programs to the requirements of democracy and socialism on a global scale makes that which is now difficult, impossible. How would Polish Solidarity have dealt with the likely possibility that by weakening the Soviet regime in Eastern Europe it would strengthen the ability of the United States to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua? In any event, would such thinking be truly internationalist or merely a left wing version of Kissingerian "linkage"? It seems to me that it would be better to leave the destruction of the Soviet empire to those within it.

No doubt the left pays a price for its balkanization. Vision often narrows to some variant of particular national myths. But there may be no alternative. Nations have come to arrange capitalism in so many different ways while "socialist" revolutions have combined liberation and domination in unexpected ways. Gone are the brave generations whose faith in the ability of socialism to resolve the contradictions of bourgeois culture mirrored their belief that capitalism had destroyed (or would soon destroy) all preexisting cultures.

Our task today is not to recapture a lost ideological rigor that once made the left confident and influential—but was also the source of its defeats and, in victory, its sins. Our task is to do what can be done in a world without heroic opportunities. Perhaps it is inconsistent and even dangerous (given the rigid form of international relations) to call for the reduction of the U.S. nuclear arsenal or that Israel withdraw from Lebanon. But what would it mean for an American left not to do so? Soviet nuclear strategy and PLO policy are not made in America. U.S. nuclear policy and (in a meaningful sense) Israeli foreign policy are.

We live in a world where the identity of nations is much stronger than that of classes. We no longer know how to speak in the name of an international socialism because our century has led us away

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from such a possibility. Nevertheless, the left can still claim to speak in the name of national ideals that are compatible with democracy and socialism. That such ideals have been betrayed in the name of both socialism and democracy is a tragedy. But we do not betray them simply because their pursuit in a cold war may give aid and comfort to another enemy. We betray them when we do nothing to enrich them.

Jules R. Benjamin
Rochester, New York

William Phillips replies:

Perhaps there is no way out for the left now. Not all problems can be solved at all times. In any event, my point was that the left, to be viable, must dissociate itself from all those ideas and movements that serve only to bolster the national policies of a totalitarian regime. It is not enough for the left to preach a vague rhetoric of justice and democracy, while ignoring all the forces that make that rhetoric meaningless—and perpetuating false and illusory notions. For example, Solidarity need not worry about weakening the Soviet Union, for that is a desirable aim. Also, to leave the "destruction of the Soviet empire to those within it" is a form of moral as well as political isolationism. And worry about "being drowned by the larger cold war chorus" is based on misconception. The cold war represents the conflict between two different social orders—about which the left should not be indifferent. Nor should it be so cavalier about reducing the strength of either America or Israel. If the socialist left is to be international, then it has to take international positions—and not simply those predetermined by radical cant.

To the Editor:

I was extremely pleased to read the "Letter from Italy" (*Partisan Review*, 1, 1983) by Francois Bondy, devoted to the work of my late brother Guido Morselli.

As far as I know, for the first time an American literary journal has devoted space to the subject, although my brother's books have been known and discussed at the Italian School of Harvard for a number of years.

I am sure that you will not mind if I point out some minor and some not so minor inaccuracies in Bondy's letter. Among the minor, there are quite a few misspellings of the titles of the books, such as *Il Communista* (it should be *Il Comunista*), *Contropassato* (*Contropassato*), plus other incorrect spellings such as *ridimensionnato* (ridimensionato), and the main character in *Il Comunista* is Ferranini, not Ferrannini.

The more serious inaccuracies have to do with the year of Guido's death; it was summer of 1973, and not 1974; he died in Varese and not near Varese; and during the war he was in Calabria and not in Sicily. Finally, in *Contropassato*, the covert attack by the Austrian army which forced Italy to surrender, took place not "at the

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start'' of the war (for Italy it was May 1915), but exactly one year later, May 1916. Probably in my brother's intent, this was not just a mere coincidence.

In any case, I am grateful that, although late, some public recognition for a very uncommon author has finally reached this country through your keen judgment.

Mario A. Morselli
South Burlington, Vermont

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